Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Lucas

Joint Energy & Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Hearing

Return on Unprecedented Investment: An Analysis of the Department of Energy's Implementation of the IIJA, the IRA, and the CHIPS and Science Act

May 10, 2023

Good afternoon, I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us for today's important hearing.

Last Congress, the Science Committee worked together on a historic achievement – passing the first comprehensive authorization of the DOE Office of Science in the CHIPS and Science Act.

A decade in the making, this bipartisan bill was painstakingly vetted by stakeholders and the scientific community. It provides DOE with a bold yet responsible and realistic policy roadmap for its greatest asset, the Office of Science.

It prioritizes the kind of work that industry is unable to support – fundamental research in high priority areas like fusion energy sciences, materials science, and advanced scientific computing, and the research infrastructure needed to make that happen. Today, I am eager to receive an update on the implementation of this important law.

But as we all know, CHIPS and Science was not the only DOE bill that became law last Congress. Today, in addition to carrying out Science Committee direction provided by the CHIPS and Science Act, DOE is also continuing to implement the Biden Administration's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.

In carrying out the IIJA and IRA, DOE faces the daunting task of allocating nearly $50 billion in additional spending for a wide range of R&D programs within the Science Committee's jurisdiction. To put this in perspective - that is roughly three times the size of DOE's annual budget for corresponding programs.

The alarming magnitude of IIJA and IRA spending is arguably too much for any agency to effectively absorb. And the manner of their passage – without adequate process or feedback from the committees of jurisdiction – should give us all pause.

This is an unprecedented time for DOE, and the agency has a lot to answer for.

So far, in DOE's implementation of these laws, we've seen the Department award hundreds of millions to a company with known ties to the CCP, stand up major program offices under unconfirmed leadership, and chase after a thousand new applied energy employees while losing essential career staff in the Office of Science.

It's our job on the Science Committee to provide critical oversight of the implementation of both substantial research funding and comprehensive program direction.

With the rapid injection of funding from the IIJA, and IRA, and the significant investments authorized in CHIPS and Science, it is important we ensure DOE has effective plans in place to implement these laws in a way that maximizes the return on taxpayer investment.

While today's hearing will provide critical oversight of recently authorized activities and new spending, we also intend to conduct a broader review at the Full Committee of the Department's operations and how it plans to contribute to America's scientific and technological competitiveness in the coming fiscal year and beyond. I look forward to arranging that hearing soon.

I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony today, I look forward to a productive discussion.