



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

---

## Opening Statement

**Chairman Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)**  
**of the Subcommittee on Energy**

Joint Investigations & Oversight and  
Energy Subcommittee Hearing:  
*Judicious Spending to Enable Success at the Office of Nuclear Energy*

October 21, 2021

Good morning, and thank you to all of our witnesses who are joining us virtually today to discuss the importance of good governance and spending practices at the Department of Energy's Office of Nuclear Energy.

This hearing could not be happening at a more important time. Congress is currently engaged in negotiations on several proposals that could transform this country's infrastructure and social safety net, allowing us to unleash the full, brilliant potential of all Americans and our economy. The Build Back Better agenda will make major, desperately needed investments in tackling climate change, including in the research space. On this Committee, we have spent a great deal of time discussing how our government should address the climate crisis, and it is time for us to move from talk to action. That applies to every aspect of our work here. Whenever the federal government is taking steps that could help decarbonize our society and improve people's lives, we need to make sure those activities are as transparent and effective as possible.

The budget of the Office of Nuclear Energy has nearly doubled in five or so years, with the budget request for fiscal year 2022 clocking in at \$1.85 billion. And spending proposals currently under consideration would inject additional funds. In recent years, the office's work has shifted from almost entirely conducting research in our national labs, to a significant amount of funding now going to academic and industrial partners. This kind of applied research, including demonstration projects and the commercial application of new technologies, is critical for meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

This hearing is a next step for this Committee in a series of oversight activities we've engaged in regarding the Office of Nuclear Energy. We spend a lot of our time working on solutions and legislating as Members of Congress, but our oversight responsibility is inherent in all of the work that we do. The rapid expansion of the work and budget of this office requires even more due diligence on our part. And in recent years, we have watched the office execute contracts and

agreements for very large projects. I applaud the Office of Nuclear Energy for its ambitious approach. But our concerns primarily center around the fact that a few of these extremely large awards have been provided in a non-competitive and non-transparent way. For example, it should never be quick and easy to make a government funded award to one private company for over a billion dollars, especially when Congress learns about it in the press. And that's part of what we're here to talk about today. Government funded research, especially research that is important for addressing the climate crisis, needs to be done right the first time. We don't have many shots on goal here to experiment with. As a nation, we need to do our homework and turn it in on time. And if we fail, we need to fail fast, learn what we could have done better, and regroup quickly.

Competition is certainly good as a general practice, as it maintains the integrity of public spending by ensuring that awards are provided on a merit-reviewed and rigorous basis. But competition is also an important way to broaden and deepen the kinds of research relationships that our government establishes, and to bring more people into the process. This can help ensure that government funds are distributed more equitably and in line with President Biden's Justice 40 initiative, which says that 40 percent of overall benefits of federal dollars should flow to marginalized communities. We need to be applying this concept at the beginning of the award process, by including it in the parameters of a competitive award, instead of thinking about it later in the process when it's too late to be useful. This is a topic that is near and dear to my heart, and I am proud that this Committee is working to make our research activities more inclusive at every level.

To be clear, we perform oversight for all of the scientific agencies that the Science Committee oversees. In other words, this could just as easily be a hearing on any other energy technology if we had similar governance concerns regarding the offices that work on those technologies. And this hearing also is not about specific administrative officials or a political party. All of the oversight we have performed on this office has been done in a strongly bipartisan way.

I want to again thank our excellent panel of witnesses assembled today, and I look forward to hearing your testimony. With that, I yield back.