



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Randy Weber

Joint Subcommittees on Investigations & Oversight and Energy Hearing – Judicious Spending to Enable Success at the Office of Nuclear Energy

October 21, 2021

Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Foster for holding this hearing. I have been—and continue to be—a strong supporter of nuclear energy and I'm pleased with this Committee's continued bipartisan support for DOE's nuclear energy research and development activities. I hope today's conversations will inform and improve our shared efforts in supporting cutting edge nuclear energy technology for the next generation.

Nuclear energy is a clean and reliable baseload energy source that is a central component of the U.S. energy portfolio: last year, nuclear energy was our country's largest domestic source of carbon-free electricity. Robust federal investment in advanced nuclear energy R&D is essential to our energy independence, our emissions reduction plans, our national security, and our international competitiveness.

We cannot afford to cede leadership in the global nuclear energy market to our international rivals, like China and Russia. That's why, last Congress, we passed the Energy Act of 2020, which provided a major update to U.S. nuclear energy policy. It was a tremendous bipartisan win that, among many things, modernized and reauthorized key nuclear energy research, development, demonstration, and commercial application activities at the Department of Energy.

This legislation was a landmark achievement for the Science Committee. I was proud to lead the effort in authorizing robust funding for the Versatile Neutron Source - or Versatile Test Reactor, codifying public-private partnerships in advanced nuclear research, and ensuring Department-wide coordination for the nuclear energy High-Performance Computation Research Program.

But, as we all know, passing legislation is just the first step in a long journey to seeing results at home. Therefore, this morning, I am eager to hear more about the Department's progress in implementing the Energy Act. To build on this success, we also have a responsibility to examine the Office of Nuclear Energy's practices in awarding R&D funds. Responsible management of taxpayer dollars has long been a priority of mine and I have always tried to encourage my colleagues to adopt this view.

That's why, in 2019, I was part of a bipartisan Science Committee request to the Department for more information and further justification of a large sole source award for the demonstration of nuclear fuel production. Today's hearing gives us a chance to explore some of our lingering questions on this award and several others. While issuing sole source awards can sometimes be beneficial, we need to make sure the appropriate safeguards are in place—and being utilized—to make fully-informed spending decisions.

Our nuclear research and development programs are too important for us to mismanage, and we want to make sure we get this right. The advanced nuclear landscape is rapidly changing, and the Department must appropriately capitalize on new opportunities, make sound investments, and harness the expertise of the nuclear stakeholder community.

I want to be clear, I support substantial Federal investment in advanced nuclear energy technologies. There is no clean energy future without nuclear energy, and the only way we can fend off the push for global market dominance from our adversaries is to continue developing cutting edge technology here at home. That is why it's critical that we closely monitor our investments.

I look forward to hearing more about the future direction of the Office of Nuclear Energy and to a productive discussion about how the Department and its partners can get the most value out of their collaborations. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today, and I yield back the balance of my time.