

Chairman Dingell at the Committee on Energy and Commerce Hearing entitled, "Department of Energy's Fiscal Year 2009 Budget Proposal"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
HEARING ENTITLED, "DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S
FISCAL YEAR 2009 BUDGET PROPOSAL"
February 7, 2008

Mr. Secretary, welcome back to the Committee. We appreciate your taking the time to appear before us and enlighten us on the Administration's priorities for the Department of Energy.

Much has happened in the energy sector in the year since you last testified. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released several landmark reports that focused the world's attention on the problem of climate change and the need for a solution. This committee spent a good deal of last year gathering information to prepare us to craft a legislative solution to this issue. The members of the Committee will be interested to hear about the Department's efforts to combat this problem and whether the Administration is willing to participate in crafting a solution.

The Congress recently passed an energy bill that included a landmark agreement on motor vehicle fuel economy and a substantial increase in the amount of biofuels that will be blended into the Nation's gasoline pool, to decrease our dependence on imported petroleum.

The bill also contained several important provisions on energy efficiency and conservation for appliances and buildings. In addition to saving energy, they will bring about a significant reduction in the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere. As we have discussed before Mr. Secretary, the Department's track record in meeting past efficiency deadlines is less than stellar. I recall from the 2005 energy bill "on which Chairman Barton led us so ably" that DOE missed a number of the deadlines contained in that statute. I hope that you will outline for the Committee what steps the Department is taking to implement the bill we just passed, particularly the energy efficiency provisions.

There are two management issues that I want to call to the Secretary's attention as well. First, is related to the Yucca Mountain project. The omnibus appropriations bill that was recently signed into law contained a substantial cut in funding for Yucca Mountain. To your credit, Mr. Secretary, you have once again proposed a higher amount of funding, and I support you in that. Given the funding shortfall you face this year, however, I am interested in how you see the project proceeding and what this meager appropriation means in terms of your ability to submit a license to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission by the end of this year.

Second, DOE has requested \$24 million to continue the Initiatives for Proliferation Prevention Program (IPP), which aims to create commercial sector employment for Russian weapons scientists who were left unemployed following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In the 1990s, this program may have helped prevent scientist migration to rogue nations. Since that time, however, the landscape has changed dramatically. Russia is now thriving. It is the largest oil producer in the world and the second

largest oil exporter after OPEC. Given their growing reserves, it is fair to ask whether we should continue supplementing the pay of Russian scientists.

In addition, IPP funds may have been badly misdirected. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently found that more than half of the scientists funded by the IPP program had no involvement with weapons.

More importantly, it appears that U.S. taxpayers are funding Russian institutes that are working on nuclear projects in Iran, including the Bushehr Reactor. The Administration says that Bushehr is a front for its nuclear weapons ambitions, and a November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's Nuclear intentions and capabilities states that "Iranian entities are continuing to develop a range of technical capabilities that could be applied to producing nuclear weapons, if a decision is made to do so."

Does DOE support Russian institutes that are also working on the Iranian nuclear project? This program was born with a noble purpose. I have no doubt that those who run this program do so with the best of intentions. But, as I have said before, there is often a thin line between the noble and the naive.

Again Mr. Secretary, thank you for your appearance here today. I look forward to your responses to our questions.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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