

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Hearing entitled, "Combating Nuclear Proliferation: The Effectiveness of the Department of Energy's Initiatives for Proliferation Prevention (IPP) Program"

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS HEARING ENTITLED, "COMBATING NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S INITIATIVES FOR PROLIFERATION PREVENTION (IPP) PROGRAM"

January 23, 2008

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for holding this hearing on nuclear proliferation. This is an issue of grave importance given the continuing political instability in Central Asia.

The Initiative for Proliferation Prevention program (IPP) had, at its inception, a noble purpose: to create jobs in the commercial world for Russian weapons scientists and engineers who became unemployed following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The central goal of this program was to provide the proper economic incentives to these scientists, so that they would direct their expertise to peaceful ventures in partnership with private U.S. companies, rather than work for rogue states or terrorist groups.

This was certainly an innovative and useful approach to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons technology in the 1990s. 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. Its economy is booming. Unemployment is declining rapidly. In short, given Russia's economic turnaround, it appears the time has come for the IPP program to show Congress its exit strategy.

Moreover, there is a serious question as to how effective the program has been. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) notes that an audit sample found that more than half of the scientists funded by the IPP program may not have had any weapons-related experience. In addition, Department of Energy (DOE) assertions that the program has created thousands of long-term, private sector jobs for former scientists cannot be objectively verified. This underscores the basic question of whether the IPP program is funding the right people and perhaps whether it can be made to work at all.

I must voice my own skepticism about the efficacy of the IPP program. It is hard to imagine that today's Russian leaders would allow our Energy Department to employ their top weapons scientists. Indeed, DOE senior officials told Committee staff that "the Russians would never let us anywhere near anyone they really care about." The Deputy Director of the IPP program concurred with that assessment.

Mr. Chairman, I began by noting the program was born with a noble purpose, and I have no doubt that those who run this program do so with the best of intentions. There is, however, often a thin line between the noble and the naive.

Finally, while today's hearing is focused on nuclear proliferation, I note that the IPP program and a parallel Department of State program are not limited to scientists who worked only on nuclear weapons, but may also include scientists working with chemical and biological weapons. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations has already initiated an investigation of the proliferation of high-containment bio research laboratories, with the first in a series of hearings on that subject held in October and more to come this year.

I would be interested to learn the extent to which DOE and the State Department may be involved in the funding of former bio warfare scientists or the construction of bio research laboratories in developing countries.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to exploring these issues further in this and future hearings. I thank you for your recognition.

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