

Opening Statement  
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Energy  
Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2020 DOE Budget”  
May 9, 2019

Secretary Perry, thank you for appearing before the Committee this morning. While I appreciate you being here, I am extremely frustrated and disappointed that the Fiscal Year 2020 Department of Energy budget is largely the same flawed, out of touch document that we saw last year. The drastic cuts contained in President Trump’s budget last year were roundly rejected by Congress and I expect that to be the case again this year.

So rather than talking about a budget that’s basically dead on arrival, I would like to discuss several important energy policy issues including energy efficiency, legacy site cleanup, nuclear waste and cybersecurity.

Unfortunately, the Department’s track record on efficiency standards for consumer products is abysmal. Since the beginning of the Trump Administration, the Department has ignored 17 legally-mandated deadlines to finalize efficiency standards for common consumer appliances. Rather than updating these standards, DOE has spent its time working to discard lightbulb efficiency standards.

This reckless rollback will lead to years of unnecessary electricity generation and carbon emissions – just to power inefficient and outdated lightbulbs. It’s unclear who benefits from this, absent a handful of lightbulb manufacturers.

Not even electricity generators support this action. In fact, 37 electric utilities sent a letter to DOE last week opposing the lightbulb rollback. They know that efficiency improvements reduce the need for new infrastructure and improve the reliability of the existing electricity supply.

I’m also concerned about the Department’s Environmental Management program, which is tasked with cleaning up the legacy waste sites where nuclear weapons were developed and built. The Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee held a hearing on DOE’s growing environmental liability just last week – which, as of this year, has climbed to a staggering \$377 billion. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) highlighted serious mismanagement at these sites and included the Department’s mounting environmental liabilities on its “High-Risk List.”

I recognize this is a problem you did not create. Unfortunately, the President’s budget makes your job even more daunting by cutting the Environmental Management program by over \$700 million from last year’s level. This is concerning, but I hope that we see better management of this program moving forward, and we want to work with you to accomplish that goal.

We must also find a solution to the storage and disposition of commercial spent nuclear fuel that currently resides at our nation's nuclear power plants. Each year, more nuclear power plants are ceasing operations. Until we come up with a federal solution to this issue, that spent fuel will be stored onsite at those plants which no longer generate power. This effectively freezes any efforts to redevelop those sites.

We need interim storage solutions to bridge the gap until a permanent repository is licensed and constructed. Mr. Secretary, I hope to work with you and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to give the Department the authority it needs to store this spent fuel at interim storage sites until we can permanently dispose of it.

Another area where I know we can work together is cybersecurity. I am extremely troubled by the report last week that earlier this year there was, for the first time, a successful cyber-attack on our electricity system. It was not a sophisticated attack and, thankfully, no customer outages occurred, but that might not be the case next time. Our country's energy infrastructure is critical. We must ensure our nation's electric system, as well as the associated dams, railways and pipelines, are all protected from an attack.

I am concerned by a recent GAO report I commissioned that found the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Pipeline Security Program has troubling weaknesses. At a hearing we held on pipeline safety and security last week, GAO informed us that TSA has only four employees to oversee the security of our nation's nearly three million miles of pipelines. That's both unacceptable and frightening.

I support legislation introduced by Ranking Member Upton and Representative Loeb sack that would allow DOE to develop a program to establish policies and procedures to improve the physical and cyber security of our nation's pipeline network. I hope you'll work with us to enact that bill into law.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for testifying before our Committee today. I yield back.