

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Energy
Hearing on “Oversight of DOE During the COVID-19 Pandemic”
July 14, 2020

Secretary Brouillette, welcome back to the Committee — a place you know well from your days as Staff Director here. We’re glad to now finally have you before us in your role as Secretary. I’d like to begin by thanking the Department of Energy (DOE) — particularly its National Laboratories — for the research they are conducting on COVID-19. Our Committee has held numerous hearings and conducted important oversight over the federal government’s woefully inadequate response to the pandemic, a response that has done very little to help alleviate the skyrocketing cases we are now seeing all around the nation. While I continue to be critical of the Administration’s response, the research being conducted at the National Laboratories is important to analyze the structure of the virus and model its spread. I look forward to hearing more specifics on this effort.

The pandemic has also seriously damaged our economy, leaving millions of Americans unemployed. The severe economic downturn is impacting the energy sector, with the energy efficiency and renewable energy industries particularly hard hit. This Subcommittee held a hearing last month with former Energy Secretary Moniz, who briefed us on the devastating impact the pandemic has had on the energy sector. We must do more to aid this struggling industry.

Earlier this month, the House passed H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act, which would help us rebuild our economy and combat climate change. The bill invests more than \$126 billion in clean energy, energy efficiency and deep decarbonization. There is no better way to stimulate the economy and create millions of good paying jobs than to modernize our badly aging infrastructure. The President has expressed interest in an infrastructure package, but he’s going to need to exert some pressure on Senate Majority Leader McConnell who refuses to act.

And speaking of the Senate, I also want to discuss our nation’s nuclear security mission because the Senate continues to try to undermine that mission in the National Defense Authorization Act. Once again, this year the Senate Armed Services Chairman attempted to strip the DOE of much of its authority over the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). This wrongheaded effort threatens the important, longstanding principal of civilian — not military — control over the nuclear weapons stockpile. It also stands to upend other non-nuclear weapons aspects of the DOE budget.

Fortunately, an amendment by Senators Cantwell and Manchin scaled back the initial Senate language, but I firmly believe that the Defense Department should not have its hand in the DOE’s budgeting process. Instead, we should be strengthening the Secretary of Energy’s role in managing the nuclear security mission, because NNSA seems to be going from quasi-independent to completely rogue with each passing year.

Turning to the bulk-power system, I have some concerns about the way DOE is implementing an executive order limiting the use of bulk-power system equipment produced by ‘foreign adversaries.’ I support this effort as part of our ongoing efforts to protect our grid, but I think there is quite a bit of confusion surrounding DOE’s implementation of the order. With the prohibitions on acquiring and installing this equipment already in place, there is a pressing need for guidance for energy projects, many of which depend on complex supply chains. I look forward to an update on the Department’s progress on finalizing this policy.

I would also like to touch on an issue that I have pressed with your predecessor Secretary Perry, and well as Under Secretary Menezes. DOE has fallen ridiculously far behind on its legal deadlines for updating appliance efficiency standards. This is almost hard to believe, but DOE has now missed 26 statutory deadlines for updating efficiency standards. I appreciate that the Department has recently — finally — started the process of catching up on these deadlines by initiating rulemaking.

But I also know that you have been putting quite a bit of resources into purely discretionary rulemakings, some of which seem designed to undercut — rather than promote — energy savings. For example, a discretionary interpretive rule in the works would make future improved efficiency standards for home furnaces almost impossible. We need to see more action from DOE now to update and finalize critical efficiency standards that save consumers money and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Secretary Brouillette, thank you for joining us today. I yield back.