

Complete Opening Statement of Rick Perry, Nominee for U.S. Secretary of Energy

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, January 19, 2017

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and distinguished members of this committee, it is an honor to appear before you as President elect Trump's nominee for the Secretary of Energy.

This confirmation process has been extremely informative and beneficial for me, and the individual discussions I had with many of the members of this committee were the most important aspect of that process.

I especially want to thank Senator Murkowski and Senator Cantwell for speaking passionately and frankly about their priorities for the country as it relates to energy policy. You may be of different parties, but I noted during those meetings what you have in common.

Both of you talked passionately about energy development, the safety and reliability of our nuclear stockpile, the vital role of our national labs, the critical importance of grid security, and the unique situations in your states. And both of you talked about these complex issues without the benefit of notes. You know well the challenges and issues facing the Secretary of Energy. If I am confirmed, I look forward to working with you.

Before I go further, I want to recognize my strongest advocate and supporter who has been there every step of the way since we met at a piano recital in 1958 – my wife Anita. It has been quite the journey for us, from a dryland cotton farm with a house that had just received power from the Rural Electrification Agency, to appointment to serve as our nation's Secretary of Energy. With us today is our pride and joy, our daughter Sydney, and her husband Brett.

I arrive at this appointment with three decades of experience in elected service – as a state representative, a state commissioner of agriculture, lieutenant governor, and governor of Texas for 14 years.

During my three and a half terms as governor, I led a state that created 2.2 million jobs, that added more people than any other state, and would stand alone as the world's 12th largest economy.

We were also the nation's leading energy producing state – not just in terms of oil and gas, but wind energy too. I have firsthand experience with the shale energy boom that revolutionized American energy and with state-led cleanup efforts to improve our environment. As Governor, I also learned the management skills for running a state, and have the executive experience necessary for leading an organization as large as the Department of Energy.

From this experience, I learned how important energy is to the American economy, and the great responsibility we have to take care of what we've been given and to protect our citizens.

If I am so fortunate as to be confirmed, this experience will inform my priorities at the Department.

I am committed to keeping Americans safe. Nuclear security is the largest portion of the Department of Energy's budget. I will be focused on continuing to protect and modernize the nation's nuclear stockpile. As a former Air Force pilot during the days of the Cold War, I understand the deterrent value of our nuclear weapons systems, and the vital role they play in keeping the peace.

Another aspect of security is ensuring the reliability of our electric grid and protecting against cyber security attacks. I am committed to undertaking enhanced security measures where necessary and assisting with recovery efforts, so that Americans can depend on stable sources of power. I will draw upon my years of experience as governor of a coastal state in organizing emergency response personnel to handle disasters effectively and efficiently.

If confirmed, I will advocate and promote American energy in all forms, and that includes renewables. America has been blessed with vast natural resources and the technology to utilize them. I am committed to helping provide stable, reliable, affordable, and secure sources of American energy. An American first energy strategy is important to create jobs and grow the economy.

I am a major proponent of maintaining American leadership in the area of scientific inquiry. I support the academic and government mission of basic research, even when it will not yield benefits for a generation. Our scientists and labs are the envy of the world. I look forward to visiting our national labs this year, if confirmed, and learning more about the unique work they are doing. I have a long record of aggressively courting leading scientific minds to bring innovation and job creation to my home state.

Furthermore, I understand, and am committed to, the vital role the Department of Energy maintains in environmental cleanup, and specifically cleaning up nuclear waste, a legacy of the Cold War. I have experience in dealing with the difficult challenges of transporting and storing low-level waste in my home state of Texas. I know this is a daunting task at the federal level, with 35 states temporarily housing waste from various nuclear programs. I look forward to working with the members of this committee to address the concerns many of you are hearing back home about nuclear waste facilities.

In summary, I am committed to modernizing our nuclear stockpile, promoting and developing American energy in all forms, advancing the department's critical science and technology mission, and carefully disposing of nuclear waste.

In my limited time, let me address a couple more issues.

I have learned a great deal about the important work being done every day by the outstanding men and women of the DOE. I have spoken several times to Secretary Moniz and his predecessors. If confirmed, my desire is to lead this agency in a thoughtful manner, surrounding myself with expertise on the core functions of the department.

My past statements made over five years ago about abolishing the Department of Energy do not reflect my current thinking.

In fact, after being briefed on so many of the vital functions of the Department of Energy, I regret recommending its elimination.

If confirmed, I will enter this role excited and passionate about advancing the core missions of the DOE, and drawing greater attention to the vital role played by the agency and the hard working men and women who dedicate themselves in pursuit of these missions.

Second, let me speak to the issue of climate change.

I believe the climate is changing. I believe some of it is naturally occurring, but some of it is also caused by manmade activity. The question is how do we address it in a thoughtful way that doesn't compromise economic growth, the affordability of energy, or American jobs.

In Texas, we have a record of taking action to address environmental challenges, including climate change. Despite a fast-growing population and one of the largest petro-chemical refining industries in the world, we saw our climate and air quality improve.

Our power plants reduced their carbon output by 17 percent, sulfur dioxide by 56 percent and nitrous oxide by 66 percent. We decommissioned 137 older, dirtier power plants while providing incentives for clean technology, such as clean coal and carbon capture and underground storage. In Houston, the billion dollar Petra Nova plant will be opening soon using carbon capture sequestration. We are also using carbon injected into wells for enhanced oil field recovery.

I signed a law to retrofit more than 15,000 engines under the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan, and we have provided incentives for energy efficiency. Our willingness to develop natural gas, and tap shale formations has helped not only Texas reduce its carbon footprint, but other states and Mexico as well.

But we truly advocated an all of the above strategy, reducing carbon emissions not just through development of cleaner fossil fuels, but through the development of renewable sources too. During my time as governor, Texas took the national lead in wind energy development, and now produces more wind power than all but five countries.

When it comes to climate change, I am committed to making decisions based on sound science and that also take into account the economic impact.

We need an energy policy for the 21st century that is focused on promoting American energy in all forms. I am committed to working with this committee and the incoming Administration to do so. This is a historic time for America and for the energy sector. I would be honored to be a part of it.

Thank you.