



Opening Statement
Hearing on DOE's FY 2020 Budget Request
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
April 2, 2019

Good morning, everyone. The committee will come to order.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for taking the time to appear before the committee to discuss the President's budget request for the Department of Energy for Fiscal Year 2020. It's seems like it's been a really quick year, at least maybe for me, I would imagine for you as well.

So, we're back with a conversation again about the budget. In looking at the budget actually many parts of this look familiar to where we were last year. I'm pleased to see the President's budget seeks increased funding to address vulnerabilities in electric infrastructure. Ensuring the cybersecurity and resiliency of our nation's grid is a really top priority for many of us here on this committee, so it's good to see your priority here as well. It also falls squarely in our jurisdiction, which is why we've devoted significant time to these challenges, including in the area of electromagnetic pulses and geomagnetic disturbances. So, again, it's good to see the Department focused so keenly on them.

While I do appreciate many parts of this budget, there are other parts that I will disagree with. It seems like we always get to the disagreeing part of it rather than the things that we do agree on. But, there are significant areas, your focus on National Labs, on advanced nuclear, on exascale computing, on quantum information science, these are all matters that have come before our committee that we've enjoyed some success in moving them out, moving legislation out. So, these are certainly areas of support. But, we've also been talking a lot in this committee this year about the issues of climate, what we can be doing to reduce emissions more broadly, what we can do to enhance our efficiencies to reduce costs for power generation, and really just be better environmental stewards.

So as we talk about those opportunities moving forward, and we had a chance in the Approps Subcommittee on Energy and Water last week, with Chairman Alexander who chairs that committee, talking about his Manhattan challenge for us if you will. But, so much of what he has outlined in terms of ways we can make an impact really lies squarely within the Department of Energy. So, it is somewhat disappointing to see the budget request again putting programs that promote energy innovation and cutting-edge science on the chopping block. I know many of my colleagues share the disappointment in the request to eliminate ARPA-E, a program that brings the private sector together with the Nation's Laboratories and universities to bridge the valley of death for emerging energy technologies.

Your budget request also eliminates both the Weatherization Assistance Program and the State Energy Program – and I'll get a little parochial here because these are so important to a state like mine.

I do appreciate the efforts of the Department to work with Alaska Native villages so they, and tribes across the country, can access the Tribal Energy Loan Guarantee Program – but, I’m troubled that the budget request proposes to eliminate that program, just as it’s getting off the ground.

These are the types of programs that help Alaskans as they are addressing the high energy prices - really the highest energy prices in the nation. Secretary Perry, when you were with me in the state, when we had an opportunity to go to Kodiak and Old Harbor, you saw firsthand how these challenges that we face I think challenge us to be more innovative and to cease on some of the innovation opportunities that we are working to advance.

You saw an electric grid powered by nearly 100 percent renewable energy in Kodiak and then you saw the first stages of a small hydro there in Old Harbor. These are not only part of Alaskans’ efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions – they will also reduce the high cost of diesel fuel, which again you saw firsthand, so that residents can stay in their communities, and open up new economic opportunities.

It’s communities like these, spread all over our country, that stand by ready to innovate and transition to a cleaner energy future – but they need our help, and the help of the Department of Energy. Programs like those proposed for elimination, and offices like the Office of Indian Energy, are vital to our future and our ability to move forward.

We all know that we need to make responsible cuts to the budget, but we don’t want to forget the critical role that innovation plays for us in helping to create jobs, boost economic growth, increase competitiveness, and strengthen our long-term security.

Upon initial review and without all the details of the budget, I do have some concerns about the proposals, I’ve outlined a couple. But, I also recognize that this is a starting place, this is where we begin the conversation about your priorities, about the President’s priorities, and the priorities of those of us here. And that from here it is incumbent on all of us to seek common ground and areas for compromise.

Mr. Secretary, I look forward to our discussion here today and thank you again for being here.

Senator Manchin?

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