



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

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## Opening Statement

**Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)**

Energy Subcommittee Hearing:

*From Transformational Science to Technological Breakthroughs: DOE's National Laboratories*

February 12th, 2025

Good morning and thank you, Chairman Weber and Ranking Member Ross, for holding this important hearing today. And thank you to this excellent panel of witnesses for being here this morning. The Department of Energy oversees 17 world-class national laboratories and an array of programs focused on ensuring U.S. leadership in the clean energy industries of the future, and on keeping our nation at the forefront of scientific discovery. The Department also has the solemn responsibility of stewarding and ensuring the reliability of our nuclear weapons stockpile.

Often for broad, bipartisan hearings like this where a major focus is on introducing our Committee's many new Members to the full range of exciting facilities and projects that the Department oversees, here is where I'd pivot to a favorite subject of mine, and that's fusion energy. And we'll certainly get to that. However, these are not normal times.

I am deeply disturbed by the actions of this Administration and its severe impacts on our nation's entire research enterprise, including the national labs. Funds appropriated by Congress to accelerate the development and deployment of a broad range of clean energy technologies have been arbitrarily and indefinitely frozen. And the new Director of the White House's Office of Management and Budget has threatened to make a large portion of these "pauses" permanent by violating the Impoundment Control Act of 1974 and, even more alarmingly, the power of the purse vested to Congress in Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution.

The widespread assault on any federally supported individual or program involved in enhancing the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of our research enterprise is also frankly staggering. I want to be very clear about this. The talking point from the President, on down to justify these draconian actions is that we need revert to an entirely merit-based system. Well, I couldn't agree more that that should be our shared goal. But what the Administration is willfully failing to even try to understand is that while every American should have an equal opportunity to succeed, not every American is born into the same level of wealth and access. The Labs' broadening participation programs were never about undermining merit. They were about creating pathways for all Americans. If we continue to leave half or more of our nation's

brainpower behind, we will never compete with China. Further, in most cases these efforts are required by statute.

Lastly, I must say that it is unconscionable that the critical missions of the Department of Energy could now be catastrophically undermined by an ill-informed, unelected billionaire and his deeply inexperienced minions. We know that the new Secretary of Energy personally granted access to DOE's IT system to personnel associated with the so-called "Department of Government Efficiency," or DOGE, over the objections of DOE's own offices of General Counsel and the Chief Information Officer.

They objected in part because a 23-year-old member of DOGE had not undergone the standard background check normally required to gain access to this highly sensitive data. The risk is further heightened due to the enormous financial conflicts-of-interest that Elon Musk, as CEO of Tesla, has with DOE. This is why Ranking Members Deborah Ross, Emilia Sykes, and I recently sent a letter to the Secretary requesting a full account of DOGE's activities at the Department and the specific access that they have been provided to proprietary and classified data.

This breach is all the more galling given that Tesla itself received a \$465 million loan from the DOE Loan Program Office in 2010 that played a crucial role in the company's rise as a global leader in electric vehicles. There appears to be no end to the hypocrisy that these folks are willing to engage in.

All this said, I recognize that the witnesses before us today are certainly not responsible for the radical actions of this new Administration, even if they have been forced to address and mitigate their consequences as best they can. So, I truly look forward to this discussion to better understand these impacts, and to chart a better path forward for our country's best and brightest minds. And yes, I look forward to hearing from the panel about recent advancements in fusion energy development.

With that I yield back.