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

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Energy Subcommittee Hearing:
Nuclear Waste Cleanup: Research and Development Opportunities for the Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management

July 13, 2022

Good morning to our panelists, and thank you to Subcommittee Chairman Bowman for holding this hearing.

The Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management represents nearly one-fifth of DOE's annual budget. Its mission is so important: to clean up the federal properties where nuclear development activities conducted during the 20th century resulted in contamination. This mission is rooted in an important part of American history: this week in 1945, the United States performed the Trinity Test – the first ever detonation of a nuclear weapon. The Manhattan Project helped the United States change the course of World War II and in turn, the course of global history.

Communities like Hanford, Oak Ridge, and Savannah River stepped up in support of the Manhattan Project, developing and testing nuclear materials in secret. These communities sacrificed so much for the war effort. Other sites across the country were established a few years later to fulfill both national security and commercial nuclear power objectives. In the decades to follow, it became clear that these early days of nuclear innovation left a complex legacy of radiological contamination. It is only right that the federal government apply the same intellectual firepower and passion to research and innovation for addressing our nation's remaining fifteen cleanup sites.

But unfortunately, it seems like these research activities have not been a priority for DOE over the past couple of decades. Less than half a percent of the overall budget for DOE's Office of Environmental Management is dedicated to science and technology development. The U.S. Government Accountability Office and the

National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine have found that DOE does not have a formal system for evaluating and organizing its cleanup-related research activities across the agency complex. DOE also does not have a clear strategy for targeting its science investments in this area.

I do want to acknowledge how much the Office of Environmental Management has accomplished in its 30-year history, having successfully completed cleanup at 92 sites. And I also appreciate that very little about DOE's remaining cleanup mission is simple. Each site has a different set of cleanup needs, because the nuclear activities conducted at each site and the resulting waste profiles are all distinct.

That said, targeted research and development here could ultimately save a significant amount of taxpayer money. DOE estimates the lifecycle costs for completing its cleanup mission at somewhere between $488 billion and $723 billion dollars. If DOE can foster strategic partnerships with industry, researchers in the academic community, and the national labs, I feel confident we will see more innovative solutions that can help reduce these costs.

I want to thank Ranking Member Lucas, Ranking Member Weber, and their staff for partnering with me and Chairman Bowman on such an important topic. We worked together to develop provisions for the DOE Science for the Future Act that would direct the Biological and Environmental Research program to study the contaminants that the Department is working to address. And we worked closely together in organizing this hearing during a very busy legislative session.

Thanks again to our witnesses for appearing here today, and I yield back.