



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

Opening Statement

**Chairman Bill Foster (D-IL)**  
**of the Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight**

Joint Investigations & Oversight and Energy Subcommittee Hearing:  
*Management and Spending Challenges within the Department of Energy's Office of Energy  
Efficiency and Renewable Energy*

Wednesday, February 5, 2020

Good morning and welcome to this joint hearing of the Investigations & Oversight and Energy Subcommittees. I'm pleased to wield the gavel for the first time as the Chair of Investigations & Oversight and to share leadership of this panel with Ranking Member Norman of South Carolina. We are here today to discuss the Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy—EERE—and its efforts to advance clean energy technologies and energy efficiency programs.

As a scientist who spent 24 years working at one of America's great national laboratories, I know firsthand how vital federally funded research is to scientific breakthroughs. EERE's investments in clean energy are an excellent example. This office has supported many of America's best innovators and businesses in their efforts to develop cutting-edge energy technologies. It is one of the federal government's most powerful tools for addressing climate change and for generating economic opportunities.

Unfortunately, the budget proposed by the Trump Administration this past year sought to reduce EERE's R&D funding by more than 80%. I'm proud to say that the bipartisan appropriations agreement signed into law in December provided robust funding for EERE in spite of that. Yet, in recent years, it seems that EERE has been slow to spend. EERE carried over \$823 million dollars into this fiscal year. This represents more than a third of the budget EERE was allocated for last year. We want to make sure EERE manages its R&D investments in an efficient manner and in keeping with Congressional intent.

Further, it has been brought to this Committee's attention that EERE canceled a \$46 million grant days before award finalists were to be announced. Ninety-two applicants submitted proposals to compete for this funding, which was intended to spur innovation in solar energy technologies. However, it seems political officials at EERE arbitrarily decided to cancel, rewrite, and reissue the grant, circumventing career staff with decades of experience, at significant cost to the taxpayer.

My Committee staff spoke with several researchers that applied to this grant who said they felt confused and disempowered by EERE's decision to cancel the funding opportunity so late in the process. My staff have prepared a report on this issue; I would now like to enter this staff report into the record.

If potential grantees do not think EERE is a reliable partner, they are less likely to engage with DOE in the future. I am concerned about the effect this could have on the United States' position as a global leader in clean energy. Of course, EERE must also be adequately staffed so that it can administer its research dollars. EERE staff levels have severely dropped since 2017, despite Congress providing more money for salaries and benefits. The Appropriations Committees have directed DOE to provide a plan for significantly staffing up by the end of this fiscal year. I understand they have yet to receive their briefing from EERE on this matter.

Let me be clear that this hearing is not about taking shots at people. We're here to think about how to make sure a great federal research program can achieve its potential. This Committee is dedicated to the stewardship of scientific research and the federal workforce that carries it out. EERE has helped deliver a competitive innovation edge to the United States. To maintain this legacy of success, it is vital that EERE remain independent of political interference and respectful of the time that stakeholders and personnel invest in their work with the agency.

Assistant Secretary Simmons, I'm glad that you can join us today. I understand how difficult it can be to find a time that works for all our schedules. That is why Committee staff reached out four weeks ago to ask DOE to provide a witness for today's hearing. I look forward to a productive discussion today, as well as a healthy working relationship in the future.

We also have a distinguished second panel for the hearing today. I thank the witnesses for being here.