

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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September 22, 2020

The Honorable Dan Brouillette
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Brouillette,

As you know, the Committee on Science, Space and Technology is committed to supporting federal research that enables the resilience, security, and performance of our nation's electricity transmission system. To that end, the Committee has advanced bipartisan legislation H.R. 5428, the *Grid Modernization Research and Development Act of 2019* and H.R. 5760, the *Grid Security Research and Development Act*, to authorize research, development, and demonstration of strategies to improve the backbone of the American energy system for the 21st century. I thank the Department for providing comments and advice in the preparation of these bills.

In 2016, the Department of Energy's Grid Modernization Initiative teed off a multi-laboratory research effort called the Interconnections Seam Study, which was to model how a more-connected national grid could better support grid stability, more efficient resource distribution, and lower power prices for consumers. By all accounts, this study would be an indispensable resource to policymakers, utility managers, and investors. And indeed, preliminary results presented at a technical conference in August 2018 indicated that connecting the three American power pools with high-voltage transmission lines would yield annual operational savings of over \$2 billion.¹ But more than two years after these preliminary results were publicized and \$1.6 million in taxpayer dollars spent, the Department has yet to release the Interconnection Seam Study to the public.

I urge the Department to release this study as soon as possible. The United States is facing devastating unemployment levels due to COVID-19, and the energy sector has been hit particularly

¹ National Renewable Energy Laboratory. Slides: *Interconnections Seam Study*. Presented at the TransGrid-X Symposium. Ames, Iowa. August 2018. Available at <https://iastate.app.box.com/s/vfgn9nikl1rz7r8x0vaoauzpm2210t35>

hard by the economic downturn. The Interconnection Seam Study, when released, will help set the table for major investments in high-voltage transmission lines that will not only lower electricity bills, but create thousands of high-paying construction and engineering jobs in the process. American workers and energy consumers cannot afford to wait.

National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) must also be permitted to re-post the preliminary study's findings and presentations on its website immediately. The Department's efforts to suppress this study as reported in the media suggests a number of violations of your own Scientific Integrity Policy.² The policy clearly states DOE employees and contractors are allowed to speak freely in scientific forums and contribute to public articles about their research, and that DOE officials must not suppress scientific or technological findings.³

I ask that your staff provide a detailed briefing for Committee staff on why the Interconnection Seam Study remains unpublished four years after it was initiated and the Department's plans for releasing it.

I also seek a briefing on DOE's efforts to ensure that program office and national laboratory leadership and staff are educated on the principles and requirements in the agency's Scientific Integrity Policy, as required by the 2007 America COMPETES Act, and its plans for naming a Scientific Integrity Official to oversee these initiatives. I note that the Department told the Government Accountability Office last year that it would designate an Official by December 2019.⁴

These briefings may be conducted separately or combined depending on staffing requirements. The briefings should be scheduled to take place for no later than October 20, 2020 and may be conducted virtually.

I thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have questions, please have your staff contact Janie Thompson of the Committee on Science, Space and Technology staff at 202-225-6375.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/08/how-trump-appointees-short-circuited-grid-modernization/615433/>

³ Department of Energy Scientific Integrity Policy. DOE P 411.2A. Available at <https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2017/01/f34/DOE%20Scientific%20Integrity%20Policy%2001112017.PDF>

⁴ <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-19-674T>

cc: Frank Lucas
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space and Technology