U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

From Theory to Reality: The Limitless Potential of Fusion Energy

June 13, 2023

Good afternoon and thank you to the Chairman and Ranking Member for holding this very important hearing today. And thank you to this quite impressive panel of witnesses for being here. The Science, Space, and Technology Committee has played a leading role in building support and shaping our national policy for fusion energy development, especially over the last several years.

The need to significantly improve support for our U.S. fusion research enterprise is actually one of the major reasons that I first ran for Congress in 1994, and one of the top reasons that I decided to seek the Ranking Member position of this Committee after Chairwoman Johnson retired last year. As you've all heard in the statements from Chairman Lucas, Ranking Member Bowman, and Chairman Williams, this support is now strongly bipartisan, and it is also bicameral.

Substantial direction for the modern fusion energy program was provided in the bipartisan Department of Energy Research and Innovation Act of 2018, and significantly expanded upon in the bipartisan Energy Act of 2020. More recently, additional guidance and extensions of current authorizations were provided in the landmark CHIPS and Science Act, which the President signed into law in August.

I am excited about the real breakthroughs we've seen in fusion over the last 2 years alone, including the monumental achievement of ignition at the National Ignition Facility in December. I'm also encouraged by the rapid growth we are now seeing in the private sector for fusion, and the major technical achievements that they are now bringing to our overall national effort. And I am especially encouraged that President Biden recognized this progress in his Budget Request for 2024, which includes over $1 billion for the Department of Energy's fusion energy research program, a 32% increase. Now, this request is not perfect. For example, it still does not include any specific funds to establish an alternative fusion energy concepts program as authorized in statute since 2018, and I plan to continue to press to address this critical gap. But taken as a whole, this proposal for fusion is a vast improvement over any previous budget request that I can recall in my time in Congress.

All that said, let us be clear. There is still a lot more work to do. This Committee has built a solid legislative framework that would ensure that the U.S. is the world leader in this potentially transformational emerging industry through the bipartisan laws that I mentioned. And this Administration is now clearly ready to follow through on this direction. But if we don't translate this sizeable leap in support into actual appropriated funds this year, then our nation will have missed a major opportunity to meet this pivotal moment. And given the growing global competition that we're now seeing in the race to commercial fusion, I believe that we would all deeply regret that.

As stated so clearly in the most recent Long Range Plan developed by DOE's Fusion Energy Sciences Advisory Committee, "Now is the time to move aggressively toward the deployment of fusion energy." Or to put this another way: If not now, then when?

So we should not take anything for granted. I am doing everything I can to make sure that going forward, our annual federal funding reflects this immense progress and the promise of fusion energy, and I invite you all to join me in this effort.

Thank you and I yield back.