Opening Statement By
Ranking Member Brad Miller
June 21, 2012

Hearing on *Department of Energy User Facilities: Utilizing the Tools of Science to Drive Innovation through Fundamental Research*

Subcommittee on Energy and Environment

Thank you Mr. Chairman. The Department of Energy user facilities are a core focus of this Committee's jurisdiction. This hearing gives Committee Members and the public an opportunity to better understand the indispensible role that the Department of Energy user facilities play in our nation's innovation enterprise. The taxpayer has billions of dollars invested in these facilities, and we should examine just what we get for that investment.

In short, we get scientific capabilities that do not exist anywhere else in the private sector or academia. Academic and industry researchers are able to break new scientific ground, as well as accelerate the process for translating scientific discovery into marketable products. At user facilities federal funds support more efficient cars and trucks; more effective drugs; lighter and stronger metals; cheaper and more durable batteries; cleaner power plants; reduced reliance on foreign energy; a clearer picture of our changing climate; and even a better understanding of the origins of the universe and the nature of space and time.

Perhaps most important, we get the talent and technologies that provide for stronger and more competitive high-tech and manufacturing sectors in the U.S. We get jobs.

I don't see much distance between Republicans and Democrats in terms of supporting the Office of Science and sustaining these facilities at a level where they can truly contribute to our nation's competitiveness.

I hope my Republican colleagues will do not use this hearing to justify drawing an arbitrary and unrealistic line around the appropriate role of government in the energy technology space. We have seen a dangerous and misguided effort to label DOE activities beyond basic research as "picking winners and losers" and "crowding out private investment" for the purpose of cutting research in clean energy technologies and slashing budgets of EERE and ARPA-E.

This perspective assumes that technology always develops in a linear fashion, that there are no market failures or "valleys of death", and that the private sector and the market has the capacity and incentive to support real innovation fully on its own.

On the contrary, the testimony from this panel of experts shows the complexity and difficulty that technology developers face in moving from idea to marketable products. It is dogma, and not market reality, that dictates where we draw a line in providing government resources to help our nation's innovators be competitive.

The Office of Science user facilities are an essential tool for helping many academics and industry researchers get beyond otherwise daunting scientific or technological problems, and I expect that they will always be a shared priority of both Democrats and Republicans.

But we would be well-served to remember that these user facilities are by no means the only tools we have at our disposal. What have come to be regarded as the "applied" programs at DOE, such as EERE and ARPA-E, can play an equally important role in moving concepts and technologies through research barriers that a light source or supercomputer can't solve.

Far from picking winners, these programs identify the other gaps, or "white spaces", where some extra resources and guidance might help the developer get beyond some technological risk and accelerate the development process. If you want to see what picking a winner looks like, just check out what our counterparts in Europe and Asia are willing to do to support innovation and domestic companies.

If we truly want to make government work for the people, facilitate our domestic industrial sector's race for global technological leadership, and bring real jobs back to the U.S. then we will drop the stale, dogmatic, and often illogical constraints that keep us from fully taking advantage of our governments resources. Our economy was built on science. From achievements in the human genome to sending a man to the moon, the federal government has effectively supported a strong innovation backbone for a century of economic success. Why stop now when the stakes are so high? Why limit ourselves?