

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“The Future of Nuclear Energy”
Energy Subcommittee Hearing

December 11, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Lummis for holding this hearing, and I would also like to thank the Assistant Secretary and our other witnesses for being here today.

Nuclear power plays a major role in providing our country with reliable energy. As a nation, it produces almost 20 percent of our total energy, and it provides almost 9 percent of the electricity generated in the great state of Texas - all with essentially no greenhouse gas emissions.

However, I also recognize that there are significant challenges to the nuclear industry going forward. The average age of the 100 active nuclear reactors in the United States is 33 years, and many are operating well beyond their original design lifetimes. Financial challenges in developing new nuclear facilities are high, and we need a better, consensus-driven solution to managing and storing our used nuclear fuel.

In addition, our energy systems are undergoing a dramatic transformation. We are quickly moving from a historic reliance on electricity generated solely from centralized sources, like nuclear energy, to a diversity of energy resources that are much more distributed, like rooftop solar panels, consumer-driven energy management tools, and residential energy storage systems. This diversity will be essential to achieving the reliability and flexibility needed to keep the lights on, and to buffer the impacts that climate change and severe weather will have on our communities and our economy.

If the past is any indication, the research priorities we set now will be very important in determining the role of nuclear power in this new energy future. The Department of Energy's research programs can make critical contributions to increasing the effectiveness of existing nuclear plants, ensuring the security of nuclear materials, reducing waste, and fostering a talented, diverse, and competitive workforce to meet industry's future needs. And our research agenda has the potential to lower barriers to advancing more efficient and safer nuclear technologies, which is something I know we will hear much more about this morning.

Again, I would like to thank both Dr. Lyons and the excellent set of witnesses on the next panel for being here today. Dr. Lyons, I look forward to hearing your vision for the future of DOE's nuclear program, and how your research priorities will help us achieve that vision.

With that I yield back the balance of my time.