

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Energy
“Department of Energy Oversight: Office of Fossil Energy.”
May 11, 2016

Good morning, and thank you Chairman Weber for holding this hearing. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary Smith for being here today.

The Department of Energy’s Office of Fossil Energy plays a critical role in developing technologies and best practices that minimize the environmental impact that we – and indeed the world – cause when we extract and use fossil fuel resources. While I also strongly support the Department’s efforts to advance renewables, energy efficiency, nuclear power, and other clean energy sources as quickly as possible, I recognize that we and our international partners are likely going to continue to use significant amounts of coal, natural gas, and oil to heat our homes and fuel our vehicles for decades to come.

So we can’t bury our heads in the sand if we’re serious about tackling climate change. We can’t just focus on developing one set of energy sources, as promising as they are. We need to do it all.

This is why I was so excited about the announcement of Mission Innovation, a commitment that the President and leaders from 19 other nations made to double their government-supported clean energy R&D investments over the next five years. This is exactly the kind of commitment we need to cover the full range of research and technology development activities required to sufficiently address the climate crisis.

And yet, just a few months after Mission Innovation was announced, the Department proposed large cuts to or the outright elimination of a number of worthwhile programs carried out by Assistant Secretary Smith’s Office, with little justification for those cuts provided in the budget request. Examples include the elimination of the Carbon Use and Reuse program, a 78 percent cut to Gasification Systems, a 73 percent cut to fuel cell research, and a 33 percent cut to the Advanced Turbines subprogram.

All of these programs aim to make fossil energy systems cleaner and more efficient, which is consistent with the goals of Mission Innovation. So, Mr. Smith, I hope you can help us better understand the rationale behind these drastic cuts that have been made, despite an effort to double overall funding for clean energy R&D in the next five years.

In addition, as we have discussed before, I would like you to provide this Committee with a clear explanation for the Department’s rather abrupt shift from support of the Texas Clean Energy Project through the end of last year to your proposal to reprogram the remaining, previously appropriated funds for it. Your timely response to the letter from the Texas delegation on this issue was helpful, as was my recent conversation with the Secretary. And the Inspector

General report released two weeks ago on the project provided further context. However, questions remain regarding the process that the Administration followed to come to its decision.

I certainly understand that sometimes new research projects are unsuccessful in meeting their initial goals, and difficult decisions must be made to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used wisely. But this needs to be done in a clear and transparent fashion, with mutually understood milestones and clearly stated potential consequences for not achieving them.

I look forward to working with you, Mr. Smith, and my colleagues on the Committee, to address these concerns and to ensure that you have the direction, tools, and resources you need to help ensure that we are using our abundant fossil energy resources as wisely and responsibly as possible.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.