

OPENING STATEMENT
Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Full Committee

“An Overview of the Budget Proposal for the Department of Energy for Fiscal Year 2017”
March 22, 2016

Thank you, Chairman Smith for holding this hearing. And thank you, Secretary Moniz, for being here to discuss the FY 2017 budget proposal and for your distinguished service to the country, not only during this Administration but throughout your career.

I think we can all agree that the federal investments in research and development have proven to be worth every penny, especially in the energy sector. Without these crucial investments over the past century the nuclear power industry would not be where it is today, the shale gas boom may have never happened, and our growing utilization of the vast array of renewable sources might be nonexistent. I am proud of our accomplishments, but we must look ahead.

During the Paris climate negotiations, Secretary Moniz and Bill Gates took a basic idea – doubling our investment in clean energy – and grew it into an unprecedented effort to modernize our world energy economy. Mission Innovation is a joint effort between 20 countries to double publicly funded clean energy research over the next five years. And this was coupled with an announcement from a group of many of the world’s top private sector investors called the Breakthrough Energy Coalition, which aims to invest billions of dollars in commercializing new technologies developed in Mission Innovation partner nations. COP21 was an ideal location for Mission Innovation to come to fruition. The way we produce and use energy over the coming decades will ultimately determine the future of our planet and technological innovation is a key

factor in all of this. I applaud you for your work to guarantee a brighter future in the face of the growing threat of climate change.

This budget request is the first attempt to identify and account for “Mission Innovation funding”. I am pleased to say that I believe the proposals for the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, the Office of Electricity, ARPA-E, and most of the programs within the Office of the Science are in line with the thrust of this new initiative and I strongly support them.

However, I am concerned that some areas of the budget were neglected, areas that are quite consistent with the ultimate goal of achieving a clean energy future. While I appreciate this year’s reasonable request for supporting the operations of the National Ignition Facility, the Fusion Energy Sciences budget within the Office of Science seems to baffle me every year – with a 10% cut proposed last year followed by a 9% cut this year. It is the only program within the Office of Science receiving a cut and there does not seem to be much justification provided for this decision.

The potential for fusion energy is growing as we see incredibly innovative researchers and companies approaching this challenge with new ideas and designs. Yet these innovative concepts seem to reach a dead end if they go to FES for support. The landscape and potential for fusion research is changing and it does not appear that the fusion energy budget is changing with it. It would be disappointing and disheartening if the ultimate fusion breakthrough never saw the light of day because of unnecessary limitations within your budget.

I also share Ranking Member Johnson’s concern with the budget for the Office of Fossil Energy, and in particular the proposed de-obligation of funds for the Texas Clean Energy Project. I join the Texas and Washington delegations in their desire to work with you to come to a fair and transparent path forward for this project. It appears to have a great deal of potential for

developing and deploying carbon capture technologies that could be key to meeting our – and the world’s – climate targets.

More broadly, the research and development activities carried out by the Office of Fossil Energy are almost entirely devoted to climate and environment impact mitigation. As much as I would like to see a faster shift toward renewable and other low carbon sources, in the near term I expect that we will continue to rely on some mix of fossil fuels. So it is incumbent upon us to find ways to make them cleaner sources of power, and I am afraid that this budget does not properly prioritize that responsibility – especially in the context of Mission Innovation.

In addition, I’m interested in learning more about how this budget proposal supports the future of advanced fission reactors, which have the potential to be significantly safer while producing far less waste than the current generation of nuclear reactors. As a zero-emission source of energy that can provide reliable baseload power, researching these new technologies should be a high priority. But your proposed 28% cut to Advanced Reactor Technologies does not seem to indicate that.

So while there is a lot to like in this budget request, I think you can understand why we’ll also have more than a few questions. Your agency plays a lead role in determining how we power our economy and protect our environment. I appreciate your leadership and look forward to working with you to address each of these concerns.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.