

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

House Committee on Science, Space and Technology
Subcommittee on Environment
Subcommittee on Energy
*“Examining Advancements in Biofuels:
Balancing Federal Research and Market Innovation”*
July 25, 2017

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

The issue we are discussing this morning is not cut and dry. As we have already heard on more than one occasion, some are willing to forgo almost any government role in promoting the development and use of renewable fuels, ignoring the progress we have made to date. This progress would not have been possible without the substantial investments and innovations made in first-generation biofuels – investments and innovations largely driven by the Renewable Fuel Standard. While I agree that there are challenges associated with the production of corn ethanol that merit continued scrutiny, it has created a bridge to a cleaner future for our transportation fuels.

That said, the progress of advanced biofuels has not matched the expectations that were set in the 2007 law. However, with commercial scale production now picking up, it appears that many of the technical challenges have been addressed. Now we must focus our attention on making these cleaner fuels more cost effective and integrating them into the market. This is precisely the role of the RFS as well as of the biofuels research supported by the Department of Energy.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration is proposing to drastically cut our investments area. If the proposed budget were enacted, the DOE Office of Science’s Bioenergy Research Centers would each see their annual budget cut by 60%, and the Bioenergy Technology Office would be cut by 72%. All of this has been proposed with little justification provided beyond a vague declaration that the Department is shifting its focus to “early-stage” research. I hope that the Department will reconsider these cuts in light of testimony we received just last week from an excellent panel of witnesses who made clear that there is no clear divide between so-called “basic” and “applied” research. That panel also indicated that we need to be making investments across the innovation spectrum if our nation is ultimately going to remain competitive in these growing industries.

While I understand that there is not yet a scientific consensus on his findings with regard to emissions from biofuels, I am happy to see that the Majority invited a witness to today’s hearing who is focused on addressing the urgent challenge of climate change. I hope Dr. DeCicco can not only provide his insights on our nation’s biofuels policy, but also can convince my colleagues to spend more time and effort on addressing what may well be the biggest long-term problem facing the world.

In closing, while there may be differing views on how best to guide our nation's biofuels policies, it is clear to me that DOE-supported research and the RFS are important tools for reducing our dependence on fossil fuels, reducing our nation's greenhouse gas emissions, and encouraging innovation that is leading to the development of advanced, more sustainable alternative fuels. I hope that today's hearing is not the end of our discussions on this matter.

With that I yield back.