

Opening Statement
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Committee on Science and Technology

New Directions for Energy Research and Development at the U.S. Department of Energy

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today. I'd like to extend my welcome to Secretary Chu. It's good to have you here, and I look forward to working with you as we continue to tackle our energy challenges.

I am pleased to see the level of commitment in the President's budget supporting research and development in the important fields of renewable energy and basic energy. As we all know, renewable energy will be an important and necessary part of our energy portfolio as we go forward with the dual goals of energy independence and a clean environment. I am also pleased that the president's budget contained a boost towards developing low-carbon coal technologies. I have always been supportive of using this abundant domestic resource for providing our country's energy needs. With widespread commercial use of carbon capture and sequestration technology, our country can hopefully have the option of replacing imports of oil and gas with coal-to-liquids fuels and methane gas from coal.

What I haven't seen or heard is what the plans are for oil and gas research and development going forward. I believe in the "all-of-the-above" answer to our energy problem, and that includes using domestic sources of oil and natural gas. Research and development in these fields does not benefit the major oil companies, but it does benefit the small independent oil and gas producers who should be helped in their efforts to bring our domestic supplies to the market rather than penalized at every turn. I am very disappointed that the President recommended that the Ultra Deepwater and Unconventional Natural Gas and Other Petroleum Research program be repealed. The prior administration made this recommendation as well and Congress repeatedly said "you're wrong" and funded this valuable program anyway. The Ultra Deep program is paid for by Federal lease royalties, rents, and bonuses paid by oil and gas companies – not taxpayers, and it will make the government more money in the long run as the resulting R&D will lead to increased royalties, rents, and bonuses paid by oil and gas companies. I will have more to say about this during Q&A, but I just want to urge the Secretary and President Obama to reconsider their position on this program.

I am also interested in hearing about the Administration's decision to move away from the idea of storing spent nuclear fuel at the Yucca Mountain repository in Nevada and how that decision will or will not affect the current applications for new plants and the future of nuclear energy in our country. Nuclear energy is of course also part of the "all-of-the-above" energy solution and should be considered a power house in our energy arsenal. Out of all the emissions-free options, it produces the most energy and is the most reliable, and I urge the Secretary to make sure it remains a part of the mix.

I look forward to Secretary Chu's testimony and the ensuing discussion on the very important work being done at the Department of Energy.