



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement of Energy Subcommittee Chairman Randy Weber (R-Texas)

Recommendations of the Commission to Review the Effectiveness of the National Energy Laboratories

Chairman Weber: Good morning and welcome to today's Energy Subcommittee hearing on the Recommendations of the Commission to Review the Effectiveness of the National Energy Laboratories. Today, we will hear from the Commission's Co-Chairs Mr. TJ Glauthier and Dr. Jerry Cohon as well as Dr. Peter Littlewood, Director of Argonne National Laboratory regarding the extent to which the DOE lab system is working well and where it can improve.

Like many topics we discuss in the Energy Subcommittee, this one requires thorough understanding of the details. Of the DOE's 17 national labs, 10 are stewarded by the Office of Science for basic research, 3 by the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) to maintain the nuclear weapons stockpile, and 4 by their respective DOE applied energy program offices.

Each of the 17 labs has distinct characteristics and capabilities that bring a unique set of challenges when it comes to management, oversight, safety and security. For example, this Summer I had the opportunity to visit the Savannah River National Lab along with some of my colleagues on this Committee. The Savannah River complex is hundreds of square miles and houses critical infrastructure for the nation's nuclear deterrent as well as facilities to support research subjects ranging from national security to environmental management.

As the witnesses will observe today, 16 of the 17 national labs are government-owned, contractor-operated, which requires a certain degree of trust between owner and operator to achieve optimal results. That said, there is one fundamental question relevant to every subject we're likely to discuss today whether it's collaborative research with the private sector, technology transfer, laboratory-directed research and development, or safety and security.

The question is: how much discretion should the DOE delegate to contractor-operators while balancing the need to maintain DOE's oversight responsibilities? Ultimately we're debating a risk-reward concept that is familiar to Congress, because we have to balance similar concerns when legislating federally sponsored research and development.

On one hand, providing more discretion to the researchers allows them to pursue the most creative ideas without encumbrances. But on the other hand, too much discretion without effective oversight can lead to waste or misuse of taxpayer funds. And as I mentioned before, the 17 labs are very diverse so the approach for each lab should be distinct if we're going to get this right.

That said, today I look forward to the recommendations of this distinguished witness panel as we consider legislative options to help the labs reach their full potential. Again, I thank the witnesses for their attendance, and I look forward to their testimony.

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