COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
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Statement of Energy Subcommittee Chairman Randy Weber (R-Texas)
Department of Energy Oversight: Energy Innovation Hubs

Chairman Weber: Good morning and welcome to today's Energy Subcommittee hearing on the Department of Energy's (DOE) Energy Innovation Hubs. This hearing will establish Congressional oversight over the four existing Energy Innovation Hubs, examining the costs and benefits of the Department's approach to collaborative research and development.

DOE Energy Innovation Hubs are designed to coordinate research efforts across the Department, encouraging cooperation between researchers in basic science, applied energy, and engineering, and bring together researchers from the national labs, academia, and industry into teams focused on solving critical energy challenges.

With appropriate goals, benchmarks, and oversight, this kind of collaborative research and development is just common sense. Through the national labs, the federal government has the expertise to conduct basic and applied research, while the private sector has the ability and motivation to move the next generation energy technology into the market place.

The Department funds the four energy innovation hubs at approximately $90 million per year. The existing hubs are focused on a number of energy challenges - including extending the life of nuclear power reactors, developing better and more powerful batteries, creating new materials for advanced energy technology, and mimicking the ability that plants have to create fuels from sunlight.

The Consortium for Advanced Simulation of Light Water Reactors, also known as "CASL" brings together our best and brightest from industry, academia, and the labs to develop codes to model and simulate operations of the U.S. reactor fleet. These cutting edge tools allow us to increase our return on investment from DOE's supercomputers within the Office of Science's Advanced Scientific Computing Research program -- the subject of a hearing we held in the Energy Subcommittee earlier this year.

One critical application of CASL's virtual environment for reactor applications, known as "VERA" for short, is to enable the nuclear industry and regulators to predict the performance of reactor components for license renewals by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

I'd like everyone to take note of the slide on the screen, which shows what is at stake for the nation's base load electricity from nuclear power if the operating fleet is unable to secure license renewals to 60 years and 80 years of operating life, respectively.

These NRC license renewals are an important issue for the reliability of our nation's electricity and for my district. The South Texas Project, currently operating near my district, provides reliable, zero-emission electricity to the state of Texas, and good-paying jobs to my constituents. It's pretty clear from

this graph just how important these licenses are to maintaining reliable, affordable power across the country. I know that Dr. Gehin has provided a similar figure in his prepared testimony so I look forward to discussing this important issue today.

The research and development underway in the CASL hub is just one example of the benefits from this collaborative research approach. The technical expertise and scientific facilities in our national labs can provide tremendous impact on the private sector through appropriate partnerships.

However, while the current DOE hubs program pursues worthy research goals, not all collaborative research is a guaranteed success. In the first round of hubs in the program, DOE established a hub focused on building efficiency. But due to cost, poor performance, and a lack of clear goals, this hub was dissolved.

Establishing a new hub, center, or project is not the answer to every problem, and new proposals must be appropriately justified to Congress and shown to meet the research and development goals for the lead DOE office. Any authorization of new or continuing hubs proposed by DOE must also include the ability to efficiently close down projects that are not achieving clear measures of success.

I want to thank our witnesses today for testifying on their valuable research, and the DOE Energy Innovation hub program. I look forward to a discussion about federal government's role in leading collaborative research and development, and how to leverage limited taxpayer dollars for the greatest economic impact and scientific achievement.

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