



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

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Statement of Chairman Randy Weber (R-Texas)

Examining Advancements in Biofuels: Balancing Federal Research and Market Innovation

Chairman Weber: Good morning and welcome to today's Joint Environment and Energy Subcommittee hearing examining federal support for biofuels.

Today, we will hear from witnesses on the cost and environmental impact of federal mandates and subsidies for biofuels production and their impact on the fuels market. We will also hear about the exciting basic and early stage research happening at our national labs that can provide the foundation for development of new, more efficient, advanced biofuels and bio-products.

As we've heard before, the federal government is a poor substitute for the market when it comes to picking the most effective energy sources and technologies.

Federal subsidies, grants, loans, and loan guarantees may prop up an industry, or give it a competitive advantage - but they can't and don't drive innovation.

The biofuels industry provides a cautionary example of this misplaced government investment. Unfortunately, the federal government hasn't accomplished much more than require the use of conventional biofuels that were already available in the commercial market.

Congress started with worthy goals, enacting mandates and authorizing subsidies with the hope of achieving energy independence and improving the environment. But as we'll hear from our witnesses today, conventional biofuels cost the taxpayers money through the cost of federal subsidies and grant programs, and they don't actually benefit the environment.

The federal government has an important role in energy innovation, but an abysmal track record on picking winners when we try to commercialize technology.

It's clear that the best value for the taxpayer in scientific discoveries, new technology, and developing the next generation of scientists is found in basic and early stage research. Industry can build on these early stage research discoveries, and use research infrastructure to create market-ready, next generation energy technologies.

We can see this nexus between basic research and potential commercial technology in the Department of Energy Bioenergy Research Centers (BRCs).

Funded through the DOE Office of Science, these centers conduct basic research in genomic sciences and microbial systems biology to advance energy-relevant systems biology.

Researchers at the BRCs provide foundational science to industry partners, who can then develop new products and biofuels based on their discoveries.

Along with three other centers around the country, the BRC at Oak Ridge National Lab – led by Dr. Paul Gilna, who joins our panel today – focuses on cutting edge research to gain access to sugars in plants that do not compete with food crops.

In a year where the administration and Congress are making tough choices about DOE's funding, the Bioenergy Research Centers were recently re-chartered for five years by Secretary Perry, with \$40 million in funding awarded in FY 2018 to continue this basic research. Dr. Gilna, thank you for joining us today, and we look forward to hearing about your important research.

By getting the government out of the way and allowing the market to determine the best approach, we can facilitate private industry's efforts to develop technology that will increase energy efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and save the American people money.

I want to thank our witnesses for testifying today, and I look forward to a discussion about the consequences caused by the federal government's intervention in the American energy market.

Congress has the opportunity to fix the problems caused by government overreach, and should advance legislation to repeal existing mandates and roll back expensive subsidy programs. This will allow us to invest in basic science research that will lead to real innovation in our energy supply.

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