



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

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Statement of Energy Subcommittee Chairman Randy Weber (R-Texas)
An Overview of Fusion Energy Science

Chairman Weber: Good morning and welcome to today's Energy Subcommittee hearing on fusion energy science. Today, we will hear from a panel of experts on the status of fusion energy science and learn about what can be done to advance this research and technology looking forward.

We have two DOE national labs represented here today as well as the ITER Organization. These experts represent the world's efforts to advance fusion energy science. The Science Committee has bipartisan interest in fusion energy research and development, and we look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the future of this exciting research.

Fusion energy science is groundbreaking because researchers are working towards a goal that seems beyond reach – to create a star to earth, contain it, and control it to the point that we can convert the immense heat into electricity. Fusion clearly is high risk, high reward research and development.

One of the Energy Subcommittee's key responsibilities is to maintain oversight of the research activities within the Office of Science. As the authorizing committee, we must also consider the prospects of future research investments.

The DOE's current budget request for fiscal year 2017 is approximately \$398 million, a proposed cut from fiscal year 2016 enacted levels at \$438 million. Funding for fusion energy science has been on a downward trend over the past few years. This sends a signal of uncertainty to the fusion research community of America's commitment to lead in this science.

Congress must decide how to effectively invest taxpayer dollars in basic research that provides the scientific foundation for technologies that today seem impossible.

Today we will hear testimony from Dr. Stewart Prager, Director of the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, which is the nation's preeminent lab in fusion science. Under his leadership, Princeton's recent upgrade to its spherical tokamak fusion reactor was completed on time and on budget. I look forward to discussing with Dr. Prager what opportunities exist for the United States to play a larger role in fusion energy R&D.

I also look forward to hearing from Dr. Scott Hsu of Los Alamos National Laboratory. Dr. Hsu's work is a great example of how our experts responsible for maintaining the Nation's nuclear weapons stockpile can apply their knowledge for an alternate use.

Of course, we are all interested to get a status update on ITER. With the complexity of a multinational collaboration like ITER, this project has faced more challenges than most. The Department of Energy will release its own assessment of this project in early May. Fortunately, today we have the opportunity to hear from the Director General of the ITER project directly, Dr. Bernard Bigot. Dr. Bigot's track record as the ITER Director General thus far has been stellar and inspiring. Dr. Bigot, we look forward to your testimony today.

It is important that this Committee continues to scrutinize the progress of ITER to ensure that it remains a good investment of tax payer dollars.

We must consider the importance of access to the ITER reactor for American researchers and America's standing and credibility as a global scientific collaborator. If the U.S. is going to lead the world in cutting edge science, we cannot take our commitments to our international partners lightly and we cannot undermine progress on complex projects.

I want to thank our accomplished panel of witnesses for testifying on fusion energy research and development today, and I look forward to a productive discussion about this exciting area of basic science.

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