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

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Statement from Randy Weber (R-Texas)

Full Committee Markup

Chairman Weber: Good morning. Thank you Chairman Smith for the opportunity to speak on this critical legislation. I want to thank you and Ranking Member Johnson for cosponsoring H.R. 4378, the Nuclear Energy Research Infrastructure Act of 2017, and for y'all's leadership in advocating for nuclear energy research and development. I'm grateful for the opportunity to work alongside my fellow Texans and the other members of this committee to support research projects that will keep America safe and globally competitive and encourage nuclear innovation.

Last Congress, this committee held hearings, met with stakeholders and worked extensively with our colleagues in the Senate to draft the Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act.

This comprehensive, bipartisan authorization bill directed the Department of Energy (DOE) to invest in supercomputing capabilities, created a framework for DOE to partner with the private sector to host prototype development for advanced reactors and laid out a clear timeline and parameters for DOE to complete a research reactor. This bill passed the House three times last Congress, and passed the House again in January as a part of the DOE Research and Innovation Act.

The research reactor, or Versatile Neutron Source, authorized in that bill is crucial for the development of advanced reactor designs, materials and nuclear fuels. This type of research requires access to fast neutrons – which are currently only available for civilian research in Russia. While modeling and simulation can accelerate R&D, nuclear energy research must be validated through a physical source, like a research reactor.

Today, we will consider my bill to authorize specific funding to build that research reactor. H.R. 4378 allocates funds from within the DOE Office of Nuclear Energy for the construction of the Versatile Neutron Source. This facility is a reactor based, fast neutron source that will operate as an open-access user facility in the DOE national lab system, and will facilitate academic and proprietary research in the United States.

Access to fast neutrons is a critical part of the development of next generation materials and fuels for advanced nuclear reactor technology. The Versatile Neutron

Source will also enable the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to verify data on new fuels, materials and designs more efficiently, expediting regulatory approval for advanced nuclear reactors.

Without this user facility, this research simply will not take place. We can't afford to lose the ability to develop innovative nuclear technology, or rely on international partners to develop safe and secure advanced reactors.

And as more developing nations look to nuclear energy to grow their economies, America must maintain our nuclear capabilities and continue to develop cutting edge technology here at home.

This bill will also help maintain America's capability to influence security and proliferation standards around the world by maintaining cutting edge nuclear science. By building this user facility, we will fortify the U.S. commitment to safely advancing nuclear technology.

H.R. 4378 will authorize funding to construct this critical user facility and ensure that we keep the best nuclear scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs working in the United States.

I encourage my colleagues to support this bill and I reserve the balance of my time.

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