

Statement of
Steven Chu
Secretary of Energy-Designate
Before the
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate
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Chairman Bingaman, Ranking Member Murkowski and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am deeply honored that President-elect Obama has asked me to serve as his Secretary of Energy and I thank him for his support and confidence.

Mr. Chairman, this committee knows well the challenges that we face. Climate change is a growing and pressing problem. It is now clear that if we continue on our current path, we run the risk of dramatic, disruptive changes to our climate system in the lifetimes of our children and grandchildren. At the same time, we face immediate threats to our economy and our national security that stem from our dependence on oil. Last year's rapid spike in oil and gasoline prices not only contributed to the recession we are now experiencing, it also put a huge strain on the budgets of families all across America. Although prices are now lower, providing some relief to American consumers, we know that our economy remains vulnerable to future price swings. We must make a greater, more committed push towards energy independence and with it a more secure energy system.

President-elect Obama recognizes that we must take sustained action to meet these challenges, and he has put forward a comprehensive, long-term plan to do so. It's an aggressive plan, but one that I believe is achievable. I would not have accepted the President-elect's nomination if I had not thought that it was essential to move ahead on this plan. In many ways, President Obama's plan builds on the good work of this committee in recent years: a greater commitment to wind, solar, geothermal, and other renewable energy sources; aggressive efforts to increase energy efficiency of our appliances and buildings; more fuel efficient cars and trucks, and a push to develop plug-in hybrids; greater investment in technology to capture and store carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants; a continued commitment to nuclear power and a long-term plan for waste management and disposal; responsible development of domestic oil and natural gas; increased commitment to research and development of new energy technologies; a smarter, more robust transmission and distribution system; and a cap-and-trade system to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Taken together, these elements of President-elect Obama's plan will put us on a course to a better energy and environmental future, create new jobs and industries, restore U.S. energy technology leadership, and help form the foundation for future economic prosperity. It will be my primary goal as Secretary to make the Department of Energy a leader in these critical efforts.

In pursuing this goal, I will be building on my work as the Director of the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab. As Director of this 4,000-person organization for the last four years, I have worked to focus the lab on our energy problems. In particular, I have challenged some of the best scientists at the Berkeley lab to turn their attention to the energy and climate change problem and to bridge the gap between the mission-oriented science that the Office of Science does so well and the applied research the leads to energy innovation. I have also worked to partner with academia and industry. I know that these efforts are working, and I want to extend this approach to an even greater extent throughout the Department's network of National Laboratories where 30,000 scientists and engineers are at work performing cutting-edge research.

At the same time, I recognize that the Department of Energy's mission is extremely broad. For that reasons, many additional priorities will command my attention and focus.

The work of the National Nuclear Security Administration in maintaining our Nation's nuclear defense and promoting nonproliferation throughout the world is critical to our national security. I take this responsibility extremely seriously, and I am committed to working with the President, the National Laboratories, other agencies, Congress and other organizations in the community to assure a safe and reliable nuclear stockpile and to address proliferation concerns as part of a long-run vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

The Department also has legal and moral obligations to clean up the wastes left over from 50 years of nuclear weapons production. I know that many of you represent states where the Department has not yet fulfilled these obligations. Cleanup of these materials is a complicated, expensive, long-term project, but I pledge to you to do my best to accelerate these efforts in order to protect human health and the environment, and to return contaminated lands to beneficial use.

I also pledge to continue the important work of the Department in many other areas – the Power Marketing Administrations delivering affordable energy, programs to modernize the electricity grid, the Energy Information Administration’s energy market data, and many others.

Finally, I was proud to be a member of the committee that produced the report “Rising Above the Gathering Storm,” commissioned by Chairman Bingaman and Senator Alexander. The over-arching message of that report is simple: the key to America’s prosperity in the 21st century lies in our ability to nurture and grow our nation’s intellectual capital, particularly in science and technology. As the largest supporter of the physical sciences in the U.S., the Department of Energy plays an essential role in the training, development and employment of our current and future corps of scientists and engineers.

As diverse as these missions and programs are, my efforts as Secretary will be unified by a common goal: improving management and program implementation.

Simply put, if the Department is to meet the challenges ahead, it will have to run more efficiently and effectively. One of my first priorities will be to put a strong leadership and management team in place – one that shares not only my vision for the Department, but also my commitment to improving the way the Department does business.

I do not underestimate the difficulty of meeting these challenges. But I remain optimistic that we can meet them. I believe in the dynamism of our country and our economy. And as a scientist, I am ever-optimistic about our ability to expand the boundaries of what is possible.

If I am confirmed as Secretary of Energy I commit to you that I will provide strong, focused, energetic leadership for the many missions of this Department. In particular, I look forward to a close partnership with this Committee. In my role as Secretary, I look forward to a new chapter of collaboration with this committee and others in Congress as we embark on an ambitious, and urgent, mission to move to a sustainable, economically prosperous, and secure energy future. The challenges we face will require bipartisan cooperation and sustained effort. I know that President-elect Obama is committed to exactly this kind of effort. If confirmed as Secretary, I will do my utmost to serve him and our great nation to the best of my abilities.

Thank you and I would be happy to take any questions that you may have.