U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY | Secretary of Energy Advisory Board

Introduction

Public awareness of the scope of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) mission and ongoing contributions to the environmental, economic and national security of the United States is low and often misunderstood. DOE leadership believes America's interests would be strengthened if the American people and the international community were more aware, more interested and, more engaged in the work being performed by DOE. A more interested and engaged public would also foster additional pride within the DOE positively effecting employee recruiting, retention and workforce development in a market where competition for top engineering and scientific talent is keen.

In a time of economic, social, and environmental challenges, the success of the DOE is a much-needed positive message, and the efforts of the DOE demonstrate bi-partisan cooperation that is forging a better future for America and the world. This report is the result of a study on the topic of more effective engagement between the DOE and the general public. The study was performed by the Branding Working group for the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB). The report includes insights, observations and recommendations from the working group which was led by Bill Samuels with additional guidance from Kirstjen Nielsen, Kay Coles James, Todd Spencer and Dave Baggett (See SEAB Branding Working Group below).

Study Findings

The Challenge (What): Is to enhance America's interest in all the "cool stuff" being created by the 32 DOE Mission Unique Program Offices at DOE's HQ and 17 national labs that enhance how we live, our national security, and our economic vitality. Currently and generally, the Department of Energy is only seen as the consumer-energy agency (oil, gas, coal, electricity), and even that portion of DOE's mission is misunderstood. Furthermore, the lack of understanding and awareness didn't happen overnight, and will require a protracted and concerted effort that will be needed to overcome the challenge.

The Vision (What winning looks like): To engage the American public in the many interesting facets of the U.S. Department of Energy in a manner that creates excitement, makes them want to learn more and drives them to share what they've learned with others. With the tremendous portfolio of world changing science, public awareness of DOE's broad mission will create an overwhelming buzz that will indicate branding mission accomplished. DOE will benefit from additional public private partnerships and an engaged public to better understand requirements, community needs and emerging technology.

Action Step (How) - A: (1) A position of Public Engagement Officer (PEO) should be created that will report to the Secretary and whose primary responsibility will be the achievement of the above stated challenge. (2) All communication personnel within the DOE program offices and at the labs will have a dotted line to the PEO, in addition to reporting to the appropriate person within their respective program office. (3) The current DOE Branding Committee will remain available as an Advisor to the new PEO. (4) The PEO working with appropriate others within DOE will develop and implement a strategy to increase understanding and awareness of DOE's mission and contributions and ongoing initiatives (See Below-Go Forward Communications Strategy of Managing that Discovery). The PEO will also develop and implement success metrics (what winning looks

like) that measure the public's awareness, understanding and, importantly, their engagement. DOE workforce engagement should also be measured and tracked on a regular basis with the goal of turning employees into Ambassadors.

Action Step (How) - B: Engage the appropriate stakeholders to consider a name change for the Department of Energy to indicate the broader missions of energy, science and nuclear security.

Supporting Observations

Observation 1:

A review of the Department of Energy (DOE) external communications found a focus on:

- **A.** Highly technical documents targeted to very small audiences.
- **B.** Community outreach limited to the immediate area around DOE sites.
- **C.** Congressional and Executive Branch outreach is limited to required oversight and coordination. There is little proactive engagement.
- **D.** There is no holistic strategic effort to enlighten the public at large to the exciting and worthwhile work that is currently underway.
- **E.** The name Department of Energy limits the public's understanding of the scope of DOE's mission creating a misconception of the function of the department.

Observation 2:

There is a tremendous amount of "really cool stuff" being created by DOE that if communicated to the American public in an interesting and engaging way, clearly has the potential to do more than inform – it has the potential to motivate citizens to contribute, to inform others and to study fields related to DOE's programs. That's branding in action.

Observation 3:

Counter intuitive as it may seem, it is actually a positive rather than a negative that the public is not currently aware of most of DOE's unique and fascinating activities. This opens the door for discovery, which is itself a powerful communication tool, if properly employed.

Observation 4:

As a result of Observations 1 through 3, our committee has chosen a "Go Forward Communications Strategy of Managing that Discovery" as opposed to a strategy of "Getting the Word Out" or "Informing by Telling". (These two approaches could not be more different. In fact, they are opposite in approach.)

Observation 5:

Revising the various Communications teams' emphasis to "Managing America's discovery of DOE's work" from "Inform by telling" constitutes a major cultural change and will require a PEO with experience in strategic engagement (not only strategic awareness building) and will require the organization of the public communications function to be assessed and revised as appropriate.

Since people tend to revert to old ways of thinking (doing the job), sharp clarity of purpose will be required. Success metrics should be developed, measured and rewarded as integral to changing culture.

Observation 6:

Culture change is hard. Even with new communications leadership, success will require total support and encouragement from the Secretary's Office.

Observation 7:

DOE's unique and world changing accomplishments provide so much substance capable of engaging the public's imagination much like NASA has historically done. To execute a winning Brand "Discovery" Strategy with this wealth of material, three core organizational competencies are required:

1. **ID the Good Stuff:** DOE's missions are all important, but some current and past efforts will be much easier to convey to the public in an engaging and personal way. The ability to search, understand and then select from the many DOE activities those activities which have the greatest potential of being of interest to the public at large is a vital competency. This is no small task. It requires the aptitude to understand the science and technology at a reasonable level for the entire breadth of DOE's mission space.

2. **Build Accessible Stories:** The ability to tell 'the story' in an engaging and understandable way. The stories need to pass the 8th grade test. The organization must create content and narratives that have great potential interest to the public. The content should help citizens understand why the content is of interest, why they should care about the content, what they can do with the content and how they can engage with DOE and others with respect to the content. The building of the story should include the potential benefit to the public, the "if this works, these great things could happen" aspect of the story. In doing so, it will explain why the public should be interested. See Example to follow.

3. **Orchestrate the Discovery:** The final step is allowing the stories to be discovered. There will always be a need for day-to-day announcements, required communications and crisis communications. That is not the discovery that is needed. For this strategy, we believe two channels are needed. The first is a DOE lead structured flow of stories. The second is having credible 3rd parties take it to the next step and inform citizens of DOE's good work. This will be more meaningful than communications provided by the Department alone. So, to the extent possible, we recommend partnering with others (e.g., Switch Energy Alliance…Apple TV, Netflix, Video Game Developers etc.) The ideal message "dissemination" partners must have an interest equal to DOE's in getting the stories out and be keenly aware of likely audience interest.

Example

On November 19th 2020, the following synopsis was part of the daily media clips for DOE leadership. It represents the typical news that is regularly broadcasted regarding the Department of Energy and the industries it serves. The **"Why it matters to me"** section was not part of the original report, but it shows how the story could be crafted with additional information for better public understanding.

PV Magazine reported that New York State-based start-up Energy Materials Corporation (EMC) "has gone public with plans for roll-to-roll printing of perovskite PV on glass." According to the article, the plan "is backed by two partnerships—one with the Eastman Kodak Company for roll-to-roll printing and another with glass and ceramics business Corning, for flexible glass." The article indicated that EMC's funding "includes a $4 million research grant from the Solar Energy Technologies Office of the U.S. Department of Energy." If the technology works, the article added, "an eight-station roll-to-roll machine could produce 4 GW of perovskite PV material per year."

Why it matters to me: Perovskite solar cells are currently the fastest-advancing solar technology. They achieve even higher solar panel efficiencies at very low production costs. By developing a new process for putting perovskite on glass, a new generation of windows can be made that also cheaply generate electricity.

Observation 8:

Never deliberately name your product or organization in a way that leads to customer confusion as to what it is you do. The Department of Energy was originally named with energy regulation and energy independence as its primary purpose. That's what the public knew it to be. The problem is, that as the mission of DOE grew, the public's perception did not keep pace. Public perceptions are hard to change. To give the enclosed strategy a much more enhanced chance of actually working, the working group strongly recommends DOE's name be changed to include the word SCIENCE. The absence of DOE's sciences in the public conversation hurts the mission of the labs. The success of the labs in advancing American science is vital to the U.S.'s ability to compete with other nation states such as China at critical levels over the long haul.

While a name change may be difficult, and will require congressional involvement and approval, the simple act of changing the name will draw significant attention in the public forum and result in greater inquiry by the media and public.

Observation 9:

In addition to educating the public that DOE is an organization performing varied, vital and interesting work, the implementation of the branding strategy it should also have a positive effect on the recruiting and retention of key people within the Department. When employees believe in the mission and are excited to come to work - That's one sure way to brand the Organization and create enthusiasm and loyalty among the team.

Observation 10:

Mission silos create barriers to communicating the broad DOE mission- the cure is cross-pollination of narratives. Once story tellers are developed across DOE, DOE needs to arm each communications office with the exciting stories of creation from other areas in the Organization. In short, each office needs to help tell

the broader story in addition to their own niche messages by conveying additional DOE messages through their established channels to their constituents. Not only will this create broader awareness, but it may also lead to additional scientific discovery as related groups benefit from earlier and better awareness of advances that could help their mission.

Observation 11:

The role of a Public Engagement Officer for an organization as large and diverse as DOE requires world class skills and experience. The caliber of individual required for this effort may not be compatible with Government Service salary restrictions. Furthermore, the role must have stability over several years and administrations. This gets in the way of leadership being appointed by any administration. And finally, the career advancement motives within the government may not align with the needs in successfully branding the DOE. Further still, the role of a Public Engagement Officer is very different than that of the head of Public Affairs. Where Public Affairs deals with continuous messaging and daily management of messaging in a risk adverse posture, the Public Engagement Officer is much more apt to orchestrate messages for the long-haul. In short, the PEO's role would be much more targeted at general public consumption than that of the head of Public Affairs.

Because of government compensation restrictions and the critical need for world-class talent, the DOE should consider the Public Engagement Officer and related office as potentially being provided by a contractor. In this case, the contractor could use commercial salaries to attract the appropriate talent. Furthermore, the government could dictate the metrics and incentives to ensure success in the contract. To maintain government control, the government could manage the effort through an appointee director and a career deputy director. This combination would provide world class messaging services by the contractor, administration oversight and control by the director, and long-term continuity by the career deputy director.

Observation 12:

Headwinds to this effort should be expected, but are worth addressing.

1. Money for marketing is often seen as a waste of tax payer dollars. This is understandable, but in this case, it is our opinion that it's wrong. The effort to explain the importance of better understanding DOE's mission by the public should be clearly made to congress and the public. The importance of citizen engagement (e.g., technology horizon scanning, consumer requirements etc.) should be explained and how the approach will encourage it.

2. The National Science Foundation (NSF) and DOE's science missions collide from a branding perspective. We recommend the two organizations work together and find ways to leverage each other's activities.

3. Appointees from either party involved in branding tend to communicate more like campaigners and usually lack the scientific experience to effectively communicate the issues. On the other hand, scientists are not wired for strategic communications and risk taking. This conjunction has contributed to the failing in strategic communications over the decades.

SEAB Branding Working Group

The Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB) was given the charge to study and recommend ways to improve the general public awareness of the Department of Energy's research and development mission (see Secretary's Charge below). In response to the charge a working group was established under the leadership of Bill Samuels Jr. The members of the working group are:

- **Bill Samuels:** Chairman emeritus of Maker's Mark Distillery. Former President and CEO of Maker's Mark. Chairman of the boar of over 25 different non-profit organizations over the years. Case Western Reserve graduate in engineering and professional designer of rocket system fuel injectors. He also has a law degree from Vanderbilt University.
- **Kirstjen Nielsen:** Sixth Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. Former White House Deputy Chief of Staff. Founder and former President of Sunesis Consulting LLC, former Special Assistant to President for Prevention, Preparedness and Response on White House Homeland Security Council. Chair of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Risk and Resilience. A member of the State Bar for Texas.
- **Kay Coles James:** President of the Heritage Foundation where she has been a trustee for 12 years. Federal and state government public servant under President George H.W. Bush and Virginia Governor George Allen. Founder of the Gloucester Institute.
- **Todd Spencer:** President and CEO of Doe Anderson, one of the oldest and continuously operating advertising agencies in the United States with globally recognized proficiencies in brand positioning. His background includes experience in a wide range of categories covering health care, consumer packaged goods, financial services, retail, sporting goods and travel and tourism.
- **Dave Baggett:** Founder and CEO of INKY. Former Co-founder & COO of ITA (now Google Flights) and co-developer of the Crash Bandicoot series. Dave is also a former Trustee of the University of Maryland, College Park.
- **Kurt Heckman:** Designated Federal Officer for the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB). Co-Founder of vCalc LLC. Former President of Sycamore.US.

Additional thanks to Richard Sauer for technical contributions.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Secretary of Energy Advisory Board

Secretary's Charge

Ms. Vicki Hollub

President and CEO

Occidental Petroleum Corporation

P.O. Box 27757

Houston, Texas 77227

Dear Ms. Hollub:

This letter will serve to direct the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB) to study the area outlined below, and submit a written report with the conclusions by December 31, 2020.

Charge Summary

This letter provides the rationale for improving the general public awareness of the Department of Energy's (DOE) research and development mission. The concept of general public awareness is commercially known as branding. This letter explains why the DOE should exert time and resources to enhance the DOE brand with general public awareness of DOE's broader mission.

The Challenge

The Department of Energy is required to provide transparency with regard to its mission and expenditure of public funds. While DOE is transparent about its unclassified work, it struggles to communicate succinctly and effectively about the breadth of the DOE research and development missions, which span the entire enterprise. In particular, difficulties in painting a clear picture for the general public regarding the magnitude, scope, and importance of DOE's work stem from a combination of important factors, including that:

(1) much of the work is scientifically complex and technical in nature;

(2) while the overall mission is simple to communicate, it is sufficiently broad to encompass a massive set of activities and individual office missions;

(3) the department is a massive enterprise, which includes 17 distinct National Laboratories with varying technical competencies; and

(4) the bureaucratic nature of the Department and the complex overlay of contractual relationships with the National Laboratories deter engagement with many outside entities.

Potential Benefits

Transparency to the Public and Congress: The Secretary is responsible for the judicious use of taxpayer dollars. Certain members of the general public, media, think tanks, industry groups, and Congress expend significant effort scrutinizing the activities of DOE. However, the majority of these groups have little-to-know awareness of the Department. Increasing awareness will yield increased scrutiny, but it will also open new avenues of opportunity and will increase the usefulness of the information communicated to interested parties, especially in Congress.

Technical Recruiting: The SEAB Innovation Report recognized the importance of maintaining and growing DOE's workforce, stating "The greatest asset of the Department of Energy is the accumulation of brilliant people collaborating on some of the nation's greatest challenges." It further recognized the fierce competition for the best and brightest STEM-educated minds and noted that "a motivating factor is the diverse array of opportunities that DOE offers," and that there are some who will "sacrifice a level of personal gain if they believe in the mission they are supporting." However, recruiting based upon the technical capabilities and opportunities depends on a fundamental knowledge of the assets available within the National Laboratory system, and attracting experts to the mission of DOE requires that mission be understandable and understood – stated more succinctly, the DOE and National Laboratory brand underpin the ability to recruit and retain a world class workforce. The best and the brightest want to contribute meaningfully to a mission that they understand and support, and will seek out opportunities to do so in centers of technical excellence.

Scientific Synergy and Industry Collaboration: The research performed within the DOE complex is at the leading edge of scientific discovery, but can often be further enhanced through increased collaboration. By providing greater public awareness of DOE's research and development capabilities and mission scope, outside entities will be better equipped to contact the DOE with interest, insight, and resources. These external partners include not only potential industry partners, but experts in academia, potential international partners, and even many other Federal Departments and Agencies.

Tech Transfer: In addition to opportunities to directly partner on research and development, the DOE and its National Laboratories are a great source of technology that is awaiting a path to commercialization. Business acumen and science skillsets do not overlap and many bodies of analysis have explored the pitfalls for technology crossing the "valley of death." An important element of success requires not only successful technology development, but investment and commercialization. Increasing the brand value of DOE and its National Laboratories will open avenues of access for parties that would never before have considered investing in the ideas and technology that reside within the National Laboratory system, increasing the pipeline of technology out of the labs and into the marketplace.

Secretary's SEAB Charge on Branding

The Department of Energy (DOE) does not have a single recognizable brand. Instead it has a myriad of loosely affiliated brands focusing on the missions of an individual office, National Laboratories, research centers, or piece of equipment. DOE and its National Laboratories would benefit greatly from a unified DOE brand and message that effectively communicates DOE's statutory mission and accommodates intrinsically linked sub-brands. The linkage of the National Laboratories' capabilities and missions to the overall DOE mission through a unified and recognizable brand would allow each to benefit from, and reinforce, one another. An improved public awareness of the Department of Energy's mission would increase the pipeline of collaborators for the Department, inspire generations of future innovators, facilitate the path-to-market for the innovative concepts

within the DOE enterprise, and help attract the best and brightest to join the ranks of its workforce over the coming decade. The value of the DOE brand is directly tied to the goals set forth by the SEAB, especially those identified in the recent SEAB Innovation Report.

While there are numerous reasons that DOE has struggled to define its brand and communicate its impact to the general public, four broad themes capture many of the challenges:

(1) Scientific and Technically Complex Work: Terms such as quantum computing, dark matter, nuclear deterrence, microgrids, and gene splicing refer to highly advanced technical subjects, that are inherently difficult to convey in colloquial terms, but the Department nonetheless should be able to describe their importance and impact to the American people. A goal of the Department should be to communicate more effectively about these strategically important scientific disciplines.

(2) The Breadth of the Mission: The name "Department of Energy" is a misnomer to a certain degree. Energy lies at the Department's mission core, but so does nuclear security and scientific discovery. The sheer breadth of the overall Departmental mission is overwhelming and sufficiently broad to encompass a large set of activities and individual office missions, which are inconsistently connected to the overall DOE mission.

(3) The Scope of the Enterprise Capabilities: The DOE's National Laboratory capabilities are even more wide-ranging than the mission, especially considering the amount of work under contract at the National Laboratories for other entities. The 17 distinct National Laboratories vary in their technical competencies, yet they share many commonalities, including their status as hubs of world-class scientific research and development.

(4) The Bureaucracy: The bureaucratic nature of the Department, the size of the workforce, and the complex overlay of contractual relationships that govern the business of the National Laboratories are a real deterring barrier to outside entities that may be interested in partnership with DOE. Even if an outside entity understands that the Department may have valuable expertise that it wishes to tap, it is difficult to understand how to work with the Department, where to start, and under what rules to engage.

Purpose of the Working Group: The SEAB DOE Brand Working Group should examine and report on the following:

(a) The level of linkage between DOE's statutory mission and its brand;

(b) The status of DOE's brand, including how branded elements of DOE and its National Laboratories are defined, coordinate, and are communicated;

(c) The value of the DOE's brand, comparing it or contrasting it to other relevant brands, such as other Federal Departments or Agencies, scientific research organizations, similarly sized or scoped organizations;

(d) Evaluation of the Department's strategic communications and their consistency with DOE's brand and/or mission;

(e) The manner in which DOE's National Laboratories' capabilities inform its brand;

(f) The consistency of DOE's use of images and symbols, the value and accuracy of DOE's seal and other visual elements in relation to the DOE mission and brand, and the level of connection between DOE's program elements and National Laboratories use of images and symbols to the overall Department images and symbols;

(g) Recommendations to improve the DOE brand, to better coordinate its sub-brands, and to improve strategic communications to convey its brand.

I therefore request that the SEAB constitute a working group comprised of SEAB members and outside experts to address questions such as these and to advise me on branding issues related to the Department of Energy.

Sincerely,

Dan Brouillette