

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Full Committee Hearing to Consider Pending Nominations

Witnesses: Dr. Geraldine Richmond to be Under Secretary for Science, Department of Energy; Ms. Cynthia Weiner Stachelberg to be an Assistant Secretary of the Interior (Policy, Management, and Budget); and Dr. Asmeret Berhe to be Director of the Office of Science, Department of Energy.

August 3, 2021

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

CANTWELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ms. Stachelberg, if nominated, you'll have a key role in stewarding on our public lands. I want to ask you about the failed oil and gas sale lease earlier this year and rise to drill in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. I say failed because you know that the sale lease brought in a paltry \$6 million to the Treasury, that is 0.67% of the 1.1 billion estimated that was used to justify opening this pristine wildlife refuge in 2017. In fact, the Trump administration spent more on preparing for the failed lease than what they raised. So to me, they didn't count a lot of associated costs and harm to communities and impacts.

I understand that in the last hour, the Department of Interior announced they will conduct a new environmental review of the Arctic Wildlife drilling program that will include consideration of greenhouse gas impacts. How do you think the newly announced environmental review will help us get a more accurate cost for Arctic drilling?

WEINER STACHELBERG: Thank you, Senator, for your question. And I'm not familiar with a recently issued review, I will say that your point does show the limited commercial benefits and interest. And I'm not currently at the department. But if I'm confirmed, I look forward to working with you and others on the committee and receiving a briefing on that really important issue.

CANTWELL: But you do agree that you need accurate costs and cost assessments?

WEINER STACHELBERG: I absolutely believe that you need accurate costs. And I look forward to working with you and others at the Department of Interior to assess and gather those accurate costs.

CANTWELL: Thank you. Ms. Richmond on the efforts of our national labs in R&D, some people have already mentioned USICA and our efforts to increase the R&D budget. With the support of many of my colleagues, we were able to authorize \$17 billion in that. Do you support an increase in funding for the Department of Energy?

RICHMOND: Thank you for that question, Senator Cantwell. Yes.

CANTWELL: Okay. Do you support a doubling of DOE's innovation budget? Or I guess I could broaden the question to if we actually doubled that, we'd see an additional \$40 billion. What kind

of results do you think we could expect from that kind of initiative, I'm referring to a report that was done on the National Academy of Sciences and the Bipartisan Policy Group on Breakthrough Energy Institute and some of the findings in that report of what we would then be able to achieve. And specifically what I'm after here is the dynamics have changed. This is not even really, in my mind, now about carbon. It's not. This is about what energy economies are you going to chase. And if you don't do the R&D, we're going to fall behind on these energy economies. And the rest of the world, everybody's all decided, the consumer has decided, other countries have decided. Everybody's moving off of carbon.

So what are we going to do to chase those economies? And those solutions? Because if we don't, we're going to be without a lot of jobs. So the report, characterize this very well. What are you thinking, more investment on the R&D side would help in doing this?

RICHMOND: Thank you, Senator Cantwell, for that really important question. We are the envy of the world when it comes to fundamental science and discovery science. And we have the potential of falling behind if we don't continue to invest and increase our investments in the basic sciences. That's where we will continue to win if we continue to provide support for them at our DOE laboratories in particular, and our facilities. Our facilities have just been critical for many of the advances that we have had in the past, and then we need to go forward. And so the fund, but we need funding for those facilities, in addition to our laboratories, and our research scientists around now. How could we make that change to where we really are going to have an impact? I think we do by funding these activities, things like ARPA-E, our energy research centers, that are really working very hard to go from discovery to the technology and then further to deployment to create the jobs. Those kinds of programs and others of the Department of Energy is launching, I think are going to be game changers with regards to our ability to get to the endpoint that we need to have. We cannot lose this race, we cannot lose this race. So the funding is critical to make sure that we can provide the technologies that are the technologies of the future to keep jobs going as we make the changes in advances in our energy technology.

CANTWELL: Thank you, Ms. Berhe I'll ask you a question for the record. But it's a similar question where the economics just lose if we don't get it right. And that is that coastal region, 17% of US land, but they're more than half of the population and wealth of our natural resource economies. If we don't do good coastal zone and management vulnerable to the seas and surges and tsunamis and understanding this, we're going to have a problem. So I look forward to your work on soils and coastal issues and getting an answer for the record. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.