

Nomination of Ernest Moniz to be the Secretary of Energy

Witnesses

Ernest Moniz

Nominee for Secretary of Energy

Committee Members

Ron Wyden (D-OR), Chairman

Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Ranking Member

Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)

Dean Heller (R-NV)

Martin Heinrich (D-NM)

John Barrasso (R-WY)

Al Franken (D-MN)

Tim Scott (R-SC)

Brian Schatz (D-HA)

Mike Lee (R-UT)

Joe Manchin (D-WV)

Lamar Alexander (R-TN)

Mark Udall (D-CO)

Jeff Flake (R-AZ)

Maria Cantwell (D-WA)

James Risch (R-ID)

Rob Portman (R-OH)

John Hoeven (R-ND)

Bernie Sanders (I-VT)

On April 9, 2013, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing to consider the nomination of Ernest Moniz to be Secretary of Energy. Moniz is nominated to replace outgoing Secretary Steven Chu who served for President Obama's first term. Currently a nuclear physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) heading the MIT Energy Initiative (MITEI) and the Laboratory for Energy and the Environment, Moniz previously worked as the Under Secretary of Energy at the Department of Energy (DOE) and Associate Director for Science in the Office of Science and Technology. He also served on the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, the Department of Defense Threat Reduction Advisory Committee, and the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future.

In his opening statement, Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) emphasized the need to transition "America to a lower-carbon economy." He outlined some major issues Moniz would face as Secretary including "how to manage newly accessible reserves of natural gas, combatting (sic) climate change, making our economy more efficient and supporting new energy technologies." He discussed the current natural gas boom and corresponding low prices, as well as the potential for and issues surrounding exporting natural gas. He brought up a report by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) that "U.S. carbon emissions last year dropped to the lowest level since 1994, thanks largely to the rise of natural gas... [which] emits 50 [percent] fewer greenhouse gasses than traditional fossil fuels." Wyden argued that "addressing climate is not just an issue of avoiding natural disasters; it's also critical to maintaining our nation's competitive advantage in a tough global economy." He stated, "Our country needs to reduce our carbon footprint" and "renewables must be part of [the] solution." He discussed a number of upcoming bills including some to "encourage hydropower and geothermal, which we would call the forgotten renewables."

Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) praised Moniz in her opening statement as possibly being "the rare nominee who gathers wide bipartisan acclaim." She spoke of his "intellectual honesty," particularly regarding his statements "in favor of a free-flowing global gas trade...defend[ing] unconventional gas from spurious criticism... [and] refrain[ing] from opportunistically changing [his] mind about nuclear power after Fukushima." She outlined some of the "challenges and problems" facing DOE including that the

U.S. is “still in search of a broad, coherent, and consistent [energy] policy,” “energy-related programs and initiatives remain fragmented and scattered throughout the federal government, [and] not enough money is getting ‘to the bench’ for research and development.”

Moniz was introduced by former Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft. Bingaman spoke of Moniz’s “outstanding qualifications” and Scowcroft stated, “I can honestly say I do not know anyone more suited to lead the [DOE] at this difficult time.”

Moniz began his testimony stating, “If confirmed by the Senate, I will work to the best of my abilities to advance the public interest across all the missions entrusted to the Department of Energy (DOE) – energy, nuclear security, science, and environmental remediation.” He outlined his experience working in each of these areas.

He noted that “DOE is the lead funder of basic research in the physical sciences” and that he will “work with the scientific community and with Congress to assure that our researchers have continuing access to cutting-edge research tools for scientific discovery and for training the next generation.” He indicated that he would “pursue” the president’s “‘all-of-the-above’ energy strategy...with the highest priority.” He stated that “the need to mitigate climate change risks is emphatically supported by the science and by many military and religious leaders as well as the engaged scientific community. DOE should continue to support a robust R&D portfolio of low-carbon options: efficiency, renewables, nuclear, carbon capture and sequestration, [and] energy storage.” He praised the numerous benefits associated with the oil and natural gas boom: job creation, manufacturing growth, reduced imports, and increased national security.

Moniz indicated that the “hardest challenges” with regard to nuclear environmental remediation sites are the “long term, expensive, complex clean-up projects in several states.” He “pledge[s] to work with the committee, with other members of Congress, and the affected communities and other stakeholders in the most transparent manner.” He aims to “accelerate solutions consistent with safe operations and budgetary realities so that contaminated lands can be returned to beneficial and productive use.”

During the question and answer section, Murkowski asked about Moniz’s commitment to an “all-of-the-above” energy strategy and his view on coal as part of the “all.” Moniz agreed with the “all-of-the-above” energy strategy. He indicated that while coal will continue to be a valuable energy resource domestically and globally, carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology needs to become “a viable and cost competitive approach” for moving toward a low carbon economy. He also indicated the need for increasing “public confidence in long-term storage of large amounts of CO₂.” In a separate question from Wyden, Moniz noted the importance of employing CCS, small modular reactors, and “the breadth of renewables including... small hydro and particularly engineered geothermal.”

Wyden inquired if Moniz agreed that “it has to be a priority to accelerate the transition to a lower carbon economy.” Moniz noted the current trend towards a low carbon economy and advocated for the U.S. to “pick up the pace.” Wyden brought up the issue that renewable energy resources are often considered not “price competitive with fossil fuel resources. Moniz indicated that “it’s the department’s push on the research and development agenda” and the “goal of innovation” to lower costs. He indicated that “remarkable cost reductions” are currently in underway for renewables such as solar and wind.

Mark Udall (D-CO) requested that Moniz “talk about how a balanced energy portfolio can and would reduce carbon emissions and slow climate change.” Moniz stated, “I certainly agree that the scientific basis warranting action is completely clear, there can be legitimate discussions about exactly what one does and at what pace.” He argued the importance of transitioning to a “low carbon economy,” using natural gas as a “bridge” energy source between traditional and renewable energies, employing CCS on coal and possibly natural gas in the future, and developing renewables and nuclear resources.

Much of the question and answer period focused on natural gas with Wyden and John Hoeven (R-ND) emphasizing hydraulic fracturing, the environment, and public sentiment. Wyden noted concern regarding the “lack of confidence that the public has” in hydraulic fracturing and how to “make sure that fracking is done in a responsible manner and to help address the public’s concern.” Moniz discussed the value of having “public confidence in environmental stewardship” and that while the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for regulations, the DOE could make strides in areas such as methane emissions and improved data. He noted the possibility of working with all of the stakeholders including EPA and industry.

Murkowski inquired as to Moniz’s “general philosophy” on natural gas exports, to which he noted that Alaska has been engaging in natural gas exportation for years. He stated that evaluating export applications involves taking into account the “public interest” and each application must be evaluated individually.

Dean Heller (R-NV) brought up issues of nuclear safety and waste. He asked, “Do you believe we should look past Yucca Mountain toward consent based sitings for long term spent nuclear storage?” Moniz stated he would pursue “advancing the blue ribbon commission agenda” including a consent based approach. He advocated for “moving the agenda of storage in parallel and

aggressively moving the agenda of repositories.”

Opening statements, witness testimonies, and an archived webcast of the hearing can be found on the Committee web site.

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