

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Edward J. Markey

Natural Resources Committee Oversight Hearing

“American Energy Initiative: Identifying Roadblocks to Wind and Solar Energy on Public Lands and Waters, Part I – Department of Interior Officials”

May 13, 2011

First of all, as we turn our attention to renewable energy today, I hope that Chairman Hastings is successfully renewing his health back home in Washington. Our thoughts and prayers are with him for a speedy recovery.

America’s public lands and waters are a virtually untapped clean energy reserve, holding some of the world’s best wind and solar resources. Yet in the first 5 months of this Congress, renewable

energy has been an invisible issue with the Republican majority.

Republicans claim to be for “All of the Above,” yet have been entirely subsumed by their “Oil Above All” approach. This committee has now passed three bills on the House floor, and not one includes anything on wind. Not one includes anything about solar, geothermal, hydropower or anything but oil.

This is a continuation of the energy policy under President Bush. During the 8 years of the Bush-Cheney Clean Energy Moratorium, the Interior Department issued more than 40,000 permits to

drill for oil and gas on public lands. But of the more than 300 applications to build solar facilities that came in during that time, exactly zero were approved. And only 5 wind permits were approved.

Fortunately, as we will hear today, leveraging America's renewable resources on public lands has become a top priority at the Interior Department under the Obama administration.

The largest solar power plant in the world, the first offshore wind farm in America, and up to 10,000 megawatts of other renewable energy

projects will soon commence construction, all on America's public lands and waters.

The 3,800 megawatts of wind and solar projects permitted just last year under the Obama Administration is 13 times more than what was permitted during the entire 8 years of the Bush administration.

I commend the Interior Department and our witnesses here today, Director Abbey and Director Bromwich, on this progress. But I do believe much more must be done.

The permitting time for wind and solar is measured in months and sometimes years, while the time for oil and gas drilling permits is measured in weeks. And you don't need a blowout preventer on a solar panel. Wind turbines don't spill anything but wind.

To even the playing field, the Department needs to work with stakeholders to complete the planning activities that will put the wind and solar project permitting schedule on par with oil and gas.

This will take greater budgeting commitment than we've seen thus far from the majority.

Earlier this week, the Republican Appropriators set a funding mark for Interior and the Environment that is nearly \$4 billion short of the President's request. That will not help get wind and solar projects online faster.

Beginning with the voyage of the Pilgrims in 1620, millions of people have ridden the strong winds of the North Atlantic to my home state of Massachusetts in search of greater freedom and opportunity. Today, those same winds are attracting investors, driving technology development, and creating good-paying jobs.

Later this year, the Cape Wind project in Massachusetts plans to begin planting 130 turbines, totaling 468 megawatts, into the waters off the shores of Massachusetts. It will ultimately produce 75 percent of the power for Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.

At this point, Cape Wind won't be held back by a permit from the Interior Department or a power purchase agreement with a utility. But it could be scuttled by a lack of financing. Like many first-of-their-kind energy projects, financing support will be critical to help Cape Wind secure necessary private investment.

Yet under Republican budget plans, the only technology worthy of federal financing support is nuclear power. The Republican 2011 spending plan H.R.1 actually rescinded \$25 billion in loan guarantee authority for solar, wind, smartgrid, and efficiency while keeping \$22.5 billion available for nuclear power.

It is ill conceived policy decisions such as these that could keep America from fully leveraging wind and solar power.

This is a very important hearing we're having today and, I hope, the first of many on the subject. I thank the witnesses for being here today and look forward to their testimony.