

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
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House of Representatives
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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “The Solyndra Failure: Views from DOE Secretary Chu”
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
November 17, 2011

Mr. Secretary, I want to welcome you to the Subcommittee.

As I have said from the outset, I believe in this oversight on the Solyndra loan guarantee issue. It's part of our job. We want to know about how these taxpayer dollars have been lost, and how we can learn from this experience not to have it repeated.

But I do not support the way Chairman Stearns and Chairman Upton have been running this investigation. They held an empty chair hearing ... they humiliated witnesses for asserting their constitutional rights ... they denied Democratic requests for witnesses ... they resisted the release of exculpatory documents ... and they provoked a gratuitous conflict with the White House. Just last week, they released cherry-picked e-mails that were contradicted by other documents and unjustly smeared George Kaiser.

And as we learned today in the newspaper, they criticize you for awarding loan guarantees at the same time they were seeking loan guarantees for solar energy projects in their own districts.

That's no way to conduct a responsible investigation. We should be fair and impartial and our goal should be to find the truth.

We also need to put this investigation into context and ask the most important question: how do we make the transition to the clean energy economy of the future?

Last week, the International Energy Agency released its World Energy Outlook. While Solyndra stories made news across the country, there was virtually no coverage of the International Energy Agency's findings. Yet they are far more important to the future of our country and the business of this Committee than whether the Department of Energy asked Solyndra to delay announcing a plant closure.

The International Energy Agency found – and I quote:

We cannot afford to delay further action to tackle climate change if the long-term target of limiting the global average temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius ... is to be achieved. ... If stringent new action is not forthcoming by 2017, the energy-related infrastructure then in place will generate all the CO2 emissions allowed, ... leaving no room for additional power plants, factories, and other infrastructure unless they are zero-carbon.

What this means is that our future depends on developing clean energy. There will be \$38 trillion invested in new energy infrastructure over the next 20 years. Our economic growth and our national security will be determined by whether we succeed in building these new industries.

Our competitors recognize this. China spent \$30 billion to subsidize solar energy in the last year alone. And jobs and manufacturing facilities are booming in China as a result.

Our Chairman says the answer is to give up. Last month, Mr. Stearns said – and I quote – the United States “can’t compete with China to make solar panels and wind turbines.”

I do not believe in surrender, Mr. Chairman. We can out-compete China. But to succeed, we have to reject the anti-science, anti-progress policies of Republicans in Congress and their oil and coal industry allies. The agenda of congressional Republicans is clear: do everything possible to maintain our addiction to fossil fuels and cripple clean energy companies that could compete with oil and coal. House Republicans voted against putting a price on carbon pollution, which would have created market opportunities for clean energy. House Republicans voted to slash funding for research and development into new clean energy technologies. And now they are opposing government investments in solar, wind, and other clean energy companies.

We need to move past Solyndra and to begin addressing our pressing energy challenges. The voluminous record before the Committee – and we have received over 186,000 pages of documents from the Department of Energy, over 13,000 from the Office of Management and Budget, over 1,000 from the White House, nearly 200 pages of documents from the Treasury – shows that the decision to award a loan guarantee to Solyndra was based on the merits, not political considerations. As Steve Isakowitz, a Bush appointee and the Chief Financial Officer at DOE, told us: the integrity of the review process was never compromised.

It is time for House Republicans to stop dancing on Solyndra’s grave and start getting serious about energy policy. And it is shameful for members of this Committee to deny the science and pretend that we do not need a comprehensive clean energy policy.

Something far more important is at stake today than scoring partisan political points: the future of our economy and the health of our planet will be at risk until we find a way to come together and enact policies that stop weather-changing carbon pollution and make our nation the world leader in clean energy.