

Statement by Daniel B. Poneman
Before the
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
May 5, 2009

Chairman Bingaman, Ranking Member Murkowski, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Deputy Secretary of Energy.

I would like to introduce my wife of nearly 25 years, Susan, and our sons, Michael and William. Our daughter, Claire, is away at college.

I am grateful and humbled by the confidence that President Obama and Secretary Chu have expressed in me through this nomination. President Obama has articulated a clear and compelling vision of America's energy future – one that will transform our economy, protect our security, and save our planet from the worst impacts of climate change. Achieving this vision will require the United States to play a leading international role in combating global warming, to invest in a secure energy future achieved through new technologies and improved efficiency, and to reduce nuclear dangers. Secretary Chu – as a brilliant scientist whose work has taken him beyond pure theory into the practical worlds of innovation and industrial applications – is uniquely qualified to spearhead the implementation of a new energy strategy. If confirmed, I can assure this Committee that I will work as hard as I can to justify their confidence and yours in support of those critical efforts.

In a sense, appearing before you today brings me full circle. My first experience working in government occurred here, in the U.S. Senate, in 1975, through the opportunity of a summer internship with my home state Senator, John Glenn. That summer launched a lifelong interest in energy, national security, and the relationship between the two disciplines. For over 30 years I have pursued that interest as I have passed through the worlds of academia, law, government, and business. Each phase has brought new perspectives and insights.

Twenty years ago the White House Fellows program first brought me to the Department of Energy which, in turn, led to the opportunity to join the National Security Council staff under George H.W. Bush, where I participated in efforts to assure that the break-up of the Soviet Union did not result in the spread of nuclear materials and technologies to more nations and adversaries. This included the negotiations that led to the landmark deal under which the United States agreed to purchase 500 metric tons of highly-enriched uranium from the Soviet nuclear arsenal, to be blended down to low-enriched uranium fuel for commercial nuclear reactors. Under this "Megatons to Megawatts" program, over 14,000 nuclear warheads' worth of HEU has been converted to LEU, and one in every ten American light bulbs is now powered by material that once sat atop missiles targeting our cities.

When President Clinton assumed office, I remained to stand up the newly-formed Directorate for Nonproliferation and Export Controls at the National Security Council. As Special Assistant to the President, I worked hard on a wide array of nuclear and nonnuclear proliferation challenges in many parts of the globe, as well as on the 1995 conference which, through US leadership, secured the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Since leaving government service in 1996, I have worked on a wide variety of legal and commercial issues along the seams where law, policy, commerce, and national security intersect, first as an attorney at Hogan & Hartson and, since 2001, as a principal at The Scowcroft Group.

The prospect of applying this experience to advance the interests of the Nation represents both an exciting challenge and an awesome opportunity.

Americans do not shrink from challenges. They embrace them. That has been the hallmark of the American experience. When the Soviets launched the Sputnik satellite in 1957, Americans responded through a redoubled commitment to science, and within a dozen years won the race to place the first man on the moon. In 1962, President Kennedy said that we chose to go to the moon within the decade not because it was easy, but because it was hard, “because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win....”

And we did win. Just as American innovation led to a reversal of the dangerous opening of a hole in the ozone, to the introduction of solid-state transistors and computers, and to more solutions to more problems than we can begin to tally.

Within that spirit and that wellspring of American ingenuity lie the answers to this Nation’s energy challenges.

But technology alone cannot explain how we overcame these great challenges. Innovation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success. Just as important are American leadership, determination, and an ability to keep our eye on the ball of our long-term strategic interests. That is how we won the Cold War. In retrospect, our success may seem to have been assured. But that is not how it appeared to the “wise men” surrounding President Truman, when they devised the containment strategy to counter the threat of Soviet aggression. They could not possibly have foreseen all the twists and turns that lay ahead, from Berlin to Cuba and beyond, but they understood that only a determined, collective effort would succeed. They supported the investments in technology to assure our military outmatched the Warsaw Pact, and organized the Atlantic Alliance to enlist the collective resources and energies of the West to resist Communist aggression.

And one other element contributed to our success in the Cold War. No US policy whose results must be measured over several decades can succeed unless it enjoys bipartisan support, and close cooperation between our Executive and Legislative Branches. The partnership between President Harry Truman and Senator Arthur Vandenberg personified

that cooperation at the outset of the Cold War, and history has judged that kind of partnership to have served our Nation well. The challenges we face over the coming decades – in transforming our energy systems, mitigating the effects of climate change, and sustaining our deterrent while reducing nuclear dangers – demand no less. If confirmed, I pledge that I will do my best to work with the distinguished members of this Committee to forge the kind of partnership that will best advance our shared interests in achieving America’s energy objectives in a manner that promotes our prosperity and protects our security.