

Statement of Richard G. Newell
Administrator of the Energy Information Administration Designee
Before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
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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 for Administrator of the Energy Information Administration (EIA). I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Chu for their confidence in entrusting me with this important assignment. I would also like to introduce my wife Bonnie and our daughters Rose and Ella, and thank them for their support.

As you know, the mission of EIA is to provide policy-neutral data, forecasts, and analyses to promote sound policy making, efficient markets, and public understanding regarding energy and its interaction with the economy and the environment. Created by the Congress in 1977, EIA is the statistical and analytical agency of the U.S. Department of Energy and as such is the nation's premier source of unbiased energy data, analysis and forecasting. EIA collects and disseminates a wide range of information covering energy production, stocks, demand, imports, exports, prices, technologies, and emissions. EIA also prepares short-term forecasts, long-term projections, and other analyses and special reports on topics of current interest to Congress and the executive branch. By law, EIA prepares products independently of policy positions taken within the federal government.

I feel strongly about the important role that independent, unbiased, and open-minded information and analysis can and should play in helping guide wise energy decisions within the public and private sectors. My undergraduate study in engineering and philosophy showed me the value of technically rigorous problem solving, as well as a reasoned approach to dissecting alternative viewpoints on complex issues. In graduate study and in my professional career I turned to applying economics, statistics, modeling, and other tools of policy analysis to understanding the operation and design of energy and environmental markets and policies.

Along the way I have worked in both the private and non-profit sectors, for government, and most recently in academia. For many years I was a senior fellow at Resources for the Future, a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that conducts independent research on energy and environmental issues. During 2005 to 2006, I served as senior economist for energy and environment on the President's Council of Economic Advisers, which offers the President objective economic advice based on economic research and empirical evidence. I have also been involved in a number of other efforts, including the bipartisan National Commission on Energy Policy, and several energy studies undertaken by the National Academies. I am currently a professor of energy and environmental economics at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, where I am also affiliated with the Fuqua School of Business.

But while I work at Duke, I live in Chapel Hill, and despite President Obama's position on the issue, I remain non-aligned when it comes to Duke-Carolina basketball. Perhaps I'd develop an allegiance if I could ever get tickets to a game.

More seriously, if confirmed I intend to bring an open mind and fresh perspective to the challenges facing EIA. EIA has many accomplishments and a proud history, but improvement is always possible and necessary, and I see a number of opportunities for ensuring that EIA information and analysis is always outstanding, responsive, and readily accessible. One is continually updating EIA's short- and long-term modeling platforms based on the best internal and external data and methods available. The forecasts, projections, and policy analyses based on these models are very widely used in the private and public sectors, and must be held to the highest standards. Another priority is improving EIA's information base and analytic capacity for understanding and assessing the interrelated roles of fundamentals, financial market behavior, and other factors in energy price formation. Also critical is reinforcing EIA's data collection efforts, including on energy demand and newly emerging fuels and technologies.

There are other opportunities as well and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with the members of this Committee, and others both inside and outside of government to improve the information and analytical base that businesses, households, and policymakers have for making sound energy decisions. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before the Committee and share my thoughts with you.