Statement of
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Nominee to be
Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management
U.S. Department of Energy

Before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate

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Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee: I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee for Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management at the United States Department of Energy.

I would like to begin my statement by expressing my gratitude to the President for the confidence in me that he has demonstrated in his nomination. I am honored, and humbled to be here, and should I be confirmed, I will do my best to meet that confidence.

I would also like to thank Secretary Moniz for his support and for his leadership of the Department of Energy.

Professional achievement is seldom an individual effort. I have had the privilege of working with a multitude of talented people throughout my career as a chemical engineer. There are countless family members, friends, mentors and colleagues who have done so much over the years to make this day possible.

I want to especially thank and recognize my husband John for always being supportive and patient and to my adult children, Ricky, Carol, and Robby, who are now on their own ways to productive careers. I am very proud of them. Lastly, I would not be here without the loving support of my parents, Horacio and Conchita, for instilling in me great values during my childhood, and for my parents-in-law whom I consider my second set of parents.

Madam Chair, I began my studies in Mexico where through the great economic sacrifice of my family, I attended private schools which offered a better education. In high school, I discovered an intense interest and gift in math and science, and I started college seeking a degree in chemical engineering and computer science at Monterrey Tech (ITESM). At the time there were very few women in engineering with limited job opportunities. This reality has heavily influenced me, and as such I have always supported and led efforts that substantially enhanced employment of and opportunities for women and minorities. I met my husband John while I was

a student and eventually married him and moved to the United States and proudly acquired my U.S. citizenship.

After completing my Ph.D. at the University of Notre Dame, I joined Argonne National Laboratory in 1988. I began my career supporting the development of technologies for the treatment of high-level waste at the Department of Energy plutonium production sites. After developing strong technical skills, I joined BP-AMOCO in 1996, where I enhanced my skills at managing complex projects, large budgets, and a multi-disciplinary staff in an industrial setting. I returned to Argonne in 2001, and became the Head of the Process Chemistry and Engineering Department where I worked on new technologies for the treatment of used nuclear fuel.

In addition, I was invited by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to be part of its three-year Fuel Cycle Study Team. The study was published in 2010 and considers economics, risk, nonproliferation, institutional structures and technology readiness in meeting U.S. energy and environmental needs. My participation in the study not only allowed me to gain experience working with high level officials and nongovernment organizations, but brought to my attention the need for the safe, permanent disposal of all types of radioactive wastes.

In 2008, I had the unique opportunity to join DOE's Office of Environmental Management, where I served as a senior program manager supporting their strategic mission in the waste processing area.

In 2010, I accepted a position as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fuel Cycle Technologies within the Office of Nuclear Energy. In this position I was responsible for directing the research and development program involving 10 national laboratories, 32 universities, and over 400 scientists and 300 professors.

I moved back to the Office of Environmental Management in June 2014 as the Associate Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary. In this capacity, I am responsible for leading EM's mission units to advance EM's cleanup mission across the DOE complex.

One of our Nation's biggest challenges remains to ensure the public that the Government is able to fulfill its responsibility regarding the timely handling and cleanup of the nuclear waste originated from both its defense and civilian programs.

Madam Chair, the Manhattan Project was a critical component of our success in World War II and the Cold War. The communities and regions that were home to these sites have made sacrifices for our Nation, and the cleanup mission of the Environmental Management program is both a legal and moral obligation.

During my time at Argonne National Laboratory and now at DOE, I have watched as EM completed 91 sites and has made significant progress at the remaining 16. The Environmental Management program has before it some of the most complex, challenging cleanup work, and

accomplishing our goals will mean applying innovative strategies to one-of-a-kind challenges -- all while ensuring that work is completed safely.

I'd like to mention a few of the important projects I have worked on in the past year. I have been involved in the recovery efforts at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico. We mapped out an ambitious Recovery Plan and we are making substantial progress. We recently completed the interim closure of Panel 6 and Panel 7, Room 7, activities necessary to isolate nitrate salt bearing waste in the WIPP underground. The Department remains committed to reopening the facility.

At Savannah River, workers at the Defense Waste Processing Facility marked a milestone for the site's liquid waste work. Since beginning operations in 1996, DWPF has poured more than 15 million pounds of glass and has immobilized more than 55 million curies of radioactivity. We are also working on construction of a Salt Waste Processing Facility in South Carolina.

Additionally, there are numerous ongoing projects that address critical cleanup issues across the complex, such as: (1) demolition of the K-31 building at Oak Ridge, (2) demolition of the Vitrification Facility and Main Process Building at West Valley, and (3) removal of approximately 680 pounds of chromium from the groundwater near the Columbia River at Richland.

The EM footprint has been reduced by about 90 percent since 1989, but some of our biggest challenges lie ahead. Safe retrieval and treatment of Hanford's tank waste is a critical part of the EM mission. In addition, completion of tank waste immobilization is an important element of the environmental legacy cleanup at Idaho. Many priorities remain, such as ongoing cleanup work at Paducah and Portsmouth, and I look forward to tackling these challenges if I am confirmed.

I believe my background, experience, and commitment have prepared me to lead the Office of Environmental Management during this particularly critical time, and I welcome the opportunity to continue my service to the Nation as Assistant Secretary for EM. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and others in the Congress to ensure that we continue the safe cleanup of the Nation's Cold War environmental legacy.

Madam Chair, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you and your Committee today. I look forward to answering any questions you and the Committee Members may have.