

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
May 14, 2025 Hearing: The Brightbill, Pierce, Prochaska and Mamula Nominations
Questions for the Record Submitted to Mr. Conner Prochaska

Questions for the Record from Ranking Member Martin Heinrich

Question 1: Mr. Prochaska, as long as the Department of Energy extends a hiring freeze, ARPA-E will be placed in a difficult position. Since program directors are hired on fixed terms of three to five years, some of them will cycle out without the ability to hire new program directors to come in and lead new projects.

If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure ARPA-E has the staff capacity to be able to continue taking on new advanced energy projects?

Response: ARPA-E's success depends on its ability to attract and retain top-tier technical talent to lead its programs. The agency's model is built around rotating program directors who bring deep expertise and perspective to breakthrough energy challenges. If confirmed, I will prioritize maintaining a strong pipeline of qualified, mission-driven professionals to ensure consistent leadership and continuity across our project portfolio.

Question 2: Mr. Prochaska, many of the technical innovations that ARPA-E helps bring to market derive from science done by the national labs.

In your view, how should ARPA-E and the national labs best coordinate to maximize the impact of the technology the national labs are building?

Response: I believe there is a tremendous opportunity to deepen coordination between ARPA-E and the national laboratories. The labs are home to some of the most advanced scientific research in the world, and ARPA-E's role is to identify where that science can be translated into disruptive, commercially relevant technologies. I see value in leveraging lab infrastructure, talent and testbeds to support ARPA-E funded projects, while maintaining ARPA-E's independence in project selection and management. The key is to view ARPA-E and the labs as complementary forces, each with a distinct role and a shared mission to drive U.S. energy leadership through innovation.

Question 3: Mr. Prochaska, if confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure that ARPA-E spends all of the funds that Congress has appropriated for the agency?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to ensuring ARPA-E funds are used effectively in support of the agency's mission and following the law.

Questions for the Record from Senator Steve Daines

Question 1: Mr. Prochaska, if confirmed to be Director of the Advanced Research Projects Agency – Energy for the Department of Energy, will you commit to working with Congress to ensure that ARPA-E's unique position continues to drive energy innovation and leads the development of critical and emerging technologies that secure American leadership?

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Response: If confirmed, I commit to ensuring ARPA-E continues to fulfill its unique and vital role in the Department's innovation ecosystem. I will work to collaborate with Congress and preserve and strengthen the mission by advancing critical and emerging technologies that enhance U.S. competitiveness, energy security and economic resilience.

Questions for the Record from Senator Catherine Cortez Masto

Question 1: Can you please expand on the responses you provided during the hearing regarding an all-of-the-above energy approach? And how would you personally define President Trump and his Administration's term - "Green New Scam"?

Response: I appreciate the opportunity to clarify my views. I believe that an all-of-the-above energy strategy means pursuing a diverse mix of energy sources to ensure our nation's energy security, economic strength, and global competitiveness. It reflects a pragmatic recognition that increasing the availability of affordable, reliable and secure energy is essential to our country's economic and physical security. As the nominee for ARPA-E, my focus would be identifying high-potential technologies that can fundamentally change how we produce, store and use energy.

Question 2: Based on your previous experiences at ARPA-E, are there steps that the U.S. can take to further solidify itself in both the discovery and commercialization of new technologies – like quantum computing and AI?

Response: I believe the U.S. has a strong foundation in both discovery and early-stage development of technologies like quantum computing and artificial intelligence – but maintaining leadership will require continued and deliberate efforts across several fronts. We must also have strong public-private pathways that accelerate the transition from discovery to deployment. That means fostering collaborative testbeds, demonstration programs and derisking emerging technologies and attracting private sector capital at the right time.

Questions for the Record from Senator John W. Hickenlooper

Question 1: This week, House Republicans are debating and considering a disastrous reconciliation bill that would create chaos for the energy industry by terminating tax credits, defunding agencies, and crippling domestic manufacturing.

Do you believe the House reconciliation bill will help or hurt your ability to fulfill ARPA-E's mission to accelerate the commercialization of new energy technologies?

Response: If confirmed, I will work to ensure ARPA-E continues to deliver strong returns on investment for the American people. Before any funding is awarded, ARPA-E rigorously vets each project for technical merit, commercial potential, and in alignment with national priorities. We will hold awardees accountable through defined milestones, regular evaluations, and go, no-go decision points. This approach ensures that taxpayer dollars are directed toward efforts that demonstrate clear promise and performance. I will always work to maximize impact with the

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resources provided and ensure ARPA-E takes smart risks to deliver the energy breakthroughs for our nation's needs.

Question 2: Department of Energy research has been credited with helping to enable the gas shale revolution. That small investment in research easily paid for itself in economic and national security benefits from the US gas industry.

Do you agree, just as we did for early oil and gas research, that we need to continue funding support for new energy sources now, such as geothermal and other cleaner sources, and that pulling back would be harmful for our economic and national security?

Response: The DOE's early investment in technologies that enabled the shale gas revolution are a powerful example of how targeted public research can yield enormous economic and national security benefits. I believe we face a similar opportunity today with emerging energy sources like geothermal, long-duration storage, advanced nuclear and other technologies. These areas hold tremendous promises to enhance grid reliability, and increase the availability of affordable, reliable and secure energy.

Question 3: ARPA-E was designed to catalyze transformational energy technologies and accelerate commercialization. The agency has helped many companies, including Colorado companies, that leverage early ARPA-E support to raise private capital to commercialize groundbreaking new technologies.

ARPA-E's SCALEUP program is designed to help the most promising projects transition from proof-of-concept to deployment. What is your view on the role of SCALEUP in ARPA-E's mission and how would you evaluate its success to date?

Response: I believe it's essential that ARPA-E remain focused on its core mission: supporting asymmetric, risk-return profile technologies that are too early-stage or too technically uncertain for traditional private investment. That mission is what makes ARPA-E unique and valuable to the innovation ecosystem. SCALEUP provides an opportunity to give promising projects the support to manage the so called "valley of death". However, ARPA-E should be vigilant to ensure that projects do not develop long-term dependence on government funding. It is important any programs, like SCALEUP or others, remain aligned with ARPA-E's charter – supporting only those technologies that have demonstrated exceptional technical promise through a rigorous, merit-based process, and where limited federal support can help overcome defined technical or scale-related barriers.