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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6150

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May 3, 2013

Mr. Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

In pursuit of nuclear fusion, the U.S. government helps fund the world's largest energy research project, the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER). By agreement, ITER is financed and managed by seven member entities—the European Union (EU), India, Japan, China, Russia, South Korea and the United States. To meet its funding requirement of 9.1% of the total ITER project cost, the U.S. contributes procurement of hardware, assignment of personnel, and cash. ITER is currently under construction in Cadarache, France with an estimated completion in late 2019, followed by a multi-year demonstration and deactivation period.

Reactor construction was originally estimated to be complete in 2017. However, ITER completion dates have frequently lengthened and project cost estimates have roughly tripled since the original ITER agreement was established in 2006.¹ Rem Haange, Director of the ITER Project, has publically stated that there have been delays in “critical and super critical items” and that the ITER Project team “has introduced methods to understand the slippages and to stop them.”² At a time when federal budgets for research are likely to be constrained for the foreseeable future, concerns have been raised that funding for other U.S. fusion energy science programs and user facilities have, and may continue to be, cut to pay for increasing ITER costs.

We are requesting that GAO investigate the following:

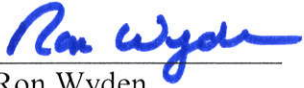
1. What is the current cost and schedule for completion of ITER? Do experts believe this cost and schedule are realistic given the technical challenges of the fusion energy project?
2. Could U.S. deliverables be delayed or adjusted without compromising this schedule? How do U.S. deliverables relate to the timely completion of the construction?
3. Are there strategies or alternatives to reduce the cost of the U.S. deliverables?

¹ Brumfiel, Geoff. “Fusion project struggles to put the pieces together.” *Nature News* (26 October 2012).

² ITER Newsline, “Let’s go toward success together!” 3 September 2012 < <http://www.iter.org/newsline/235/1283> >

Please contact David Berick of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources or Doug Clapp on the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development of the Committee on Appropriations staffs if you, or your staff, have any questions concerning this request.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
Chairman
Committee on Energy and
Natural Resources



Dianne Feinstein
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Development
Committee on Appropriations



Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and
Natural Resources



Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Development
Committee on Appropriations