

**Statement of
John F. Kotek**

**Nominee to be
Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy
Department of Energy**

**Before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate**

October 20, 2015

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, Members of the Committee: I am grateful for the opportunity to appear today as you consider my nomination to be the Assistant Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Energy at the Department of Energy (DOE).

I am honored to have been nominated for this post by President Obama. I also deeply appreciate the confidence that Secretary Moniz has expressed by asking me to serve in this capacity. And I am grateful for the statement of support for my nomination provided by Senator Risch and the Idaho Congressional delegation.

I would like to start by thanking, from the bottom of my heart, my wife Denise. She has been extraordinarily supportive of me throughout our 21 years of marriage and she understands completely the challenge we have been asked to undertake, having herself worked at DOE in the 1990s. In fact, we first met at DOE's Argonne National Laboratory in 1991, and we dated "long-distance" through the year she spent working at the Savannah River site in South Carolina before we married in 1994.

Earlier this year, I was appointed as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy. In that position I served under Assistant Secretary Pete Lyons, who is well known to this committee, and who retired at the end of June. This is my third stint as a DOE employee, having started my career at DOE headquarters from 1989 to 1998, then rejoining DOE as Deputy Manager of the Idaho Operations Office from 2003 to 2006. Between my first two jobs at DOE I was on the staff of Argonne National Laboratory at the old Argonne-West facility in Idaho, which is now part of the Idaho National Laboratory. While I was born in Hawaii and was raised in Massachusetts, I have called Idaho home since 1999. And I should note that during my time with Argonne, in 2002, I served as the American Nuclear Society's Glenn Seaborg Congressional Fellow through the American Association for the Advancement of Science, working in the office of Senator Jeff Bingaman when he chaired this very committee.

After leaving DOE in 2006 I went into the private sector, advising clients on a wide range of energy and natural resource issues with a particular focus on the siting of controversial facilities. I believe that my facility siting experience, coupled with my nuclear background, prepared me

well for my role as Staff Director to the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future, a position in which I served from 2010 to 2012. My time as staff director was truly one of the highlights of my career, and not just because it gave me an opportunity to work for people like co-chairmen Lee Hamilton and Brent Scowcroft, Senators Pete Domenici and Chuck Hagel, and of course Dr. Ernest Moniz. The main reason my service was such a highlight was that it gave me an opportunity to help a bi-partisan panel made up of some of the best minds in the country dig deep into a controversial issue and develop a set of recommendations that were unanimously adopted and widely accepted by individuals and organizations on all sides of the nuclear waste issue. I know that the Commissioners have been heartened by the work this committee has done to incorporate the BRC recommendations into proposed legislation and I am eager to work with you and others to see the nation's nuclear waste management program advance and to set a solid foundation for the program going forward.

Looking at the mandate of my organization more broadly, I have long believed that nuclear energy can and should play an important role in meeting our twin objectives of meeting rising global energy demands while addressing the threat posed by emissions of carbon and other greenhouse gases. To be sure, nuclear energy isn't the only way of tackling this challenge, and I believe the President's "all of the above" energy strategy is the right one. For example, in my most recent position as a private energy consultant I played a small role in the construction of three commercial wind farms, so I know the advantages that wind power has to offer in terms of abundance and speed of construction in some parts of the country. But I also know the challenges associated with intermittent power supplies like wind and solar, and I believe that the Administration's strategy of developing a wide range of low-carbon energy technologies gives us the best chance of meeting carbon reduction goals both at home and abroad.

In the nine months since I returned to DOE, I have seen great opportunity for DOE to work with industry, universities, with our national laboratories and with our international partners to ensure nuclear energy technologies can continue to meet current energy demands while providing opportunities for new nuclear energy supply in the intermediate and long-terms. I'm particularly excited about the opportunities for small modular reactors and for even more novel reactor technologies to provide safe, affordable, low-carbon electricity and other energy products — including process heat, hydrogen production and desalination services.

The DOE Office of Nuclear Energy (NE) applies knowledge to advance nuclear power as a resource capable of meeting the Nation's energy, environmental, and national security needs by resolving technical, cost, safety, proliferation resistance, and security barriers through research, development, and demonstration as appropriate. NE's program is guided by the four research objectives detailed in its Nuclear Energy Research and Development Roadmap:

- Develop technologies and other solutions that can improve the reliability, sustain the safety, and extend the life of current reactors.

- Develop improvements in the affordability of new reactors to enable nuclear energy to help meet the Administration's energy security and climate change goals.
- Develop sustainable fuel cycles.
- Understand and minimize the risks of nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

And of course, in addition to advancing DOE's nuclear energy research agenda, NE is responsible for implementing the Administration's strategy for the management of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive wastes.

If I am fortunate enough to be approved by this committee and confirmed by the Senate, these are the kinds of areas that will be my focus. I also look forward to working with this committee to identify additional opportunities to advance nuclear energy as a part of our low-carbon energy future. I hope to secure your support so that I might have that opportunity.

Thank you, and I welcome any questions you may have.