REMARKS GIVEN BY SECRETARY SAMUEL BODMAN

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I want to thank everyone for joining me here today – both here in Washington as well as via video at our facilities throughout the country.

First I would comment on what a great slide show that was. I hope you all had a chance to see it. It's really a testimony to the terrific work done by this department and that everyone here works on all day, everyday, and in my view, they don't get enough credit for it.

Today, in the midst of our nation's political season, I find myself in a very unusual position for a Cabinet Secretary. As many of you know, I have no ambitions to run for political office once my time here at the Energy Department is over. And as such, perhaps it frees me to be a little bit more blunt, a little bit more direct than I might otherwise be.

And so, as I enter my last few months of service with you here at DOE, I thought I would take this opportunity to share some thoughts with you today – about the energy and the national security challenges that we face, and just what we must do, and are doing, to address those challenges.

The way I see it, I've had one agenda since I began serving with you three-and-a-half years ago, and that agenda has not changed.

It is what the President appointed me to do, which was to provide leadership for this extraordinary Department and its people, both federal employees and contractors, toward the fulfillment of our mission in service of the American people. And I see our collective mission this way: to discover the solutions to power and secure America's future.

Our world is confronting rapidly growing demand for energy. We see it everyday – we see it in rising prices, we see it in an urgent need to produce and use energy more cleanly and more efficiently.

And as our friends at EIA can tell us, that demand in all likelihood will only increase with time – as will our need to provide sources of energy to fuel economic growth and development around the world in a way that does not harm our shared environment or, if I could add, our security.

So to that end, together we are tasked with carrying out three fundamental duties.

First, we must lead our nation on a path to meeting our energy needs in a diverse, affordable, clean and environmentally sustainable fashion.

Second, we must maintain and support our nuclear stockpile and reduce the threat of nuclear terrorism here and all around the world.

And thirdly, and really underlying all we do, we must continually push back the frontiers of science. After all our basic research efforts are the building blocks for the future. They are the building blocks for our security and, indeed, for America's future economic competitiveness.

Perhaps at no other point in the history of this Department has this mission been so vital. Make no mistake about it: all of you are at the center of these issues. You are leading, and you must continue to lead, the country and the world through these endeavors.

One of the things that impresses me most about this Department is your collective ability to remain, if you will, above the fray, which can be frustratingly difficult to do here in Washington. But I believe that our objectivity, our faithfulness to the facts, our commitment to doing what is right and what is best, can never be compromised.

We must be honest with ourselves and with all Americans about the challenges that we face as a nation, the solutions that are available to us and the means necessary to achieve those solutions.

So today, why don't we start there, at that point.

Throughout our nation's history, the strength and vibrancy of our economy has been rooted in America's ability to innovate – in our commitment to discover, to create and to change.

Our nation's ingenuity has been responsible for dramatically improving the efficiency of our industries and for destroying old one and creating entire new ones; for making us safer and more secure in the world; for remarkable improvements in our health and well-being; and for making our lives more convenient and more comfortable. But all that opportunity brings with it a tremendous amount of responsibility. And nowhere is this truer than with regard to energy.

The simple fact is, our lives today – our homes, our offices, our vehicles and our industries – consume an enormous amount of energy. And while many American families and American businesses are taking steps to responsibly reduce their energy use, I believe that, as a nation, we have only just begun to recognize and fully appreciate this key truth: and that is that the production and use of energy has a significant cost – both in monetary and in environmental terms.

Our job, at this Department – indeed, a fundamental responsibility of our entire government – is to recognize that cost and lessen it.

So, how do we do that?

For starters, we must continue to pursue the development and widespread deployment of renewable energy technologies and alternative fuels, including advanced hybrid vehicle technologies, hydrogen fuel cells, solar and wind power as well as advanced biofuels.

This Department, in conjunction with academia and the private sector, has made remarkable progress over the last few years in these areas and many others.

By way of just one example I would highlight our sizeable investments – totaling over $1 billion since the start of 2007 – to spur the growth of a robust, sustainable next-generation biofuels industry, and in particular to tap the great potential of cellulosic biofuels derived from nonfood sources.

As a part of that effort, our newly formed Bioenergy Research Centers are only one year old, yet they are already expected to conduct field trials in a few more years for perennial plants and trees that will enable us to harvest cellulose efficiently – and to transform this biomass into sugars, and then to transform those sugars directly into ethanol, gasoline, diesel fuel as well as other transportation fuels.

These efforts involve gene manipulation, and they are a potentially game-changing development. Through efforts to streamline and accelerate our technology transfer and commercialization, I'm quite confident that we'll be able to move these breakthroughs from the laboratory to the marketplace with greater speed and agility then we even had a few years ago.

Even while we are rightly placing a great deal of emphasis on renewables and alternative fuels, we also must recognize that until we achieve transformative breakthroughs – which we are well on our way to doing – that our world will continue to operate on fossil fuels.

We know, for example, that this nation possesses an abundant coal supply. Our challenge is to find ways to produce and use coal and other hydrocarbons more cleanly and efficiently to reduce – or perhaps eliminate – their environmental impacts.

One way to do this is through the development of carbon capture and storage technology, or CCS, which this Department is actively engaged in doing, as well as through programs that increase fuel efficiency and develop new and better exploration and production methods.

These, and other tactics, will make a real difference in how we utilize our conventional resources.

Now, any realistic approach to addressing our energy and climate problems must also acknowledge that new nuclear power plants must be built in this country.

Critical to this effort is addressing the spent fuel issue and fulfilling our statutory obligation to build the Yucca Mountain repository. To that end, just a few months ago, the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management completed the 8,000 page License Application for the Yucca Mountain repository.

This was really a great day for them, a great day for this Department and a major step forward for this Department and for our nation.

And as we build new plants, I believe we must shift away from our once-thru spent fuel policy. I believe that we must move to recycling.

That initiative, in part, is included in the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, or GNEP, which seeks to responsibly expand nuclear power globally. Twenty-one nations from all around the world have become our partners in this effort – and we expect more to join with us next month as we gather in Paris. We expect all of these countries to work together with us to harness the promise of nuclear power to meet the energy needs of the 21st century and to reduce the risk of proliferation.

That kind of world-wide support and momentum in my view cannot be ignored.

Over the long term, we also need to continue our pursuit of new sources of energy such as fusion – the energy source that powers our sun and the stars with the promise of unlimited amounts of energy with no environmental impact. This is a daunting technical challenge, but one that, in partnership with our international partners, I'm hopeful we will achieve for future generations.

These are the major components of the energy strategy that is being actively pursued throughout this Department.

We are focused on providing clean, reliable, affordable and sustainable supplies of energy to power our own economy – and the global economy – and to protect our environment.

Put simply: Our work is not done.

So when I say that we must continue to do these things, and do them aggressively, I really mean it because, in my view, we have no choice.

The threads of energy security and national security are becoming increasingly intertwined, particularly as it pertains to things nuclear.

Here, too, this Department is at the nexus of our nation's response.

Your work to carry out our fundamental responsibilities regarding the security and reliability of our nuclear weapons stockpile and protecting against the threat of nuclear terrorism is of the highest priority.

The fact is, nuclear weapons exist in the world. And as such, the United States absolutely must maintain a credible, reliable deterrent.

As you know, it is our policy to do so with the lowest number of weapons possible, consistent with our national security and our commitments and obligations to our allies, and appropriate to the threats of the 21st century.

However, without assuming serious risk, further reductions in the total stockpile are only achievable with a responsive nuclear infrastructure.

That is why we're undertaking an effort to create a smaller, safer, more secure and less expensive nuclear weapons complex that leverages the scientific and technical capabilities of our workforce and meets our national security responsibilities.

The Cold War legacy that built this complex left us in the wake of one of the largest environmental remediation projects mankind has ever known – our friends at EM can attest to that. Through our redesigned infrastructure, we will prevent a similar legacy for future generations. And I am very proud of your work collectively in that regard.

I'm also very proud of the significant steps this Department has taken to prevent nuclear proliferation.

Over the past few years, the remarkable cadre of professionals within the NNSA has worked to safely remove highly enriched uranium from vulnerable sites around the world, securing and upgrading 85 percent of the former Soviet Union's weapons sites and recovering 16,000 radioactive sources here in the U.S., and training thousands of security and export officials all over the world.

And, though serious work remains, in my view, that is real progress on a real set of issues. In the words of one knowledgeable observer, "You people are really heroes!" And I agree with that.

As I have said before, we have remarkable technical capabilities in these areas, and I am pleased that we are now being appropriately recognized for it within the broader national security framework and intelligence community. This is critical, because the expertise that resides at the laboratories, and throughout this Department, is absolutely necessary to address the global threat of nuclear terrorism and issues of strategic energy security.

We have a vital role to play, and we are increasingly making significant contributions to our national intelligence system.

Let me make one final, but no less important, point. Without the talent, the expertise, and the dedication of our Department's scientists and engineers, we would not be able to achieve the breakthroughs that truly change the nature of our thinking, improve our security, and fundamentally alter how we produce, deliver and use energy.

In all areas – from developing and deploying renewable energy technologies, to producing conventional fossil fuels more cleanly, to increasing our energy efficiency – our basic research efforts are essential.

They are equally essential to maintaining this nation's security, our technological preeminence as well as our economic competitiveness – this latter issue is something that in my view is too often overlooked.

Collectively our national laboratories in my view are the single greatest scientific enterprise in the world. Our scientists and engineers are achieving transformational discoveries on a scale that is absolutely unique in the world.

Many of the solutions to our nation's challenges are already clear, and you are working hard to develop and to deploy them. Others are coming into clearer focus each day, thanks to your pioneering work. And still others are left out there to be discovered at some point in time in the future.

Achieving lasting solutions takes innovative thinking, perseverance, and a lot of hard work. And it also takes serious time. After all, you don't deal in the easy problems. You take on the hard ones, because frankly, you are the only ones that can collectively do it.

The work you do and your significant accomplishments – whether it is in the laboratory or in an office, here in Washington or in the field – you do not receive in my view nearly the level of praise and attention that you should.

But, I know as well as you do, that is not why you do it. You do it because it is important. In fact, in today's world it could not be more important.

Ultimately, this Department's success is not measured in clever sound bites – it is measured in real results. And by that measure, I am confident that this Department will continue to succeed.

As the late Warren Brookes once wrote, "the real energy of our society arose not from the raw materials in the ground, but from the brain-matter in our heads."

I would tell you thankfully, we have no shortage of brain matter at the Department of Energy. Today, as always, I remain ever thankful for the opportunity to serve with you all. Thank you very much for listening to my thoughts.