

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**  
**Hearing on “DOE’s Nuclear Weapons Complex: Challenges to**  
**Safety, Security, and Taxpayer Stewardship”**  
**September 12, 2012**  
*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

The Department of Energy is responsible for ensuring that some of the world’s most dangerous materials are handled safely and securely. This responsibility is not without its challenges.

We were reminded of these challenges with the alarming security failures at the Y-12 National Security Complex this past July. This site was considered the Fort Knox for the nation’s highly enriched uranium, and long considered the best of the best when it came to security. Yet in the early morning hours of July 28, the site showed dramatic breakdowns across the board – guard force response, security equipment, communications – when put to the test by three protesters who gained access to a secure area and had time to deface the building housing the facility’s most volatile substance – highly enriched uranium.

Fortunately, the security breach was not by a terrorist organization, but it revealed alarming weaknesses that raise questions about current federal oversight of contractor security at this site and throughout the nuclear weapons complex.

Sadly, we have seen these problems before. This committee knows, perhaps better than any committee in Congress, the history of safety and security failures in the nuclear weapons complex. Over the past two decades, we have worked together in a bipartisan fashion to spotlight these failings – at the weapons labs and at the weapons production sites -- and to urge necessary reforms. Strong safety and security oversight has been a consistent and central theme of this committee's work and the focus of many of our hearings and related investigations.

There are serious management problems in the nuclear weapons complex, demonstrated by alarming cost overruns and delays that put literally billions of taxpayer dollars at risk. It is clear from our work that something needs to be done.

But it is also clear that, in order to identify how best to ensure strong taxpayer stewardship, and maintain safety and security in these most dangerous facilities, that we diagnose the problems accurately, and come up with solutions that do not diminish the security and safety advances of the past decade. Indeed, today, everyone is being asked to do more with less; however, we cannot institutionalize less oversight and expect more safety and security.

I believe that effective independent oversight of the department’s critical missions is essential to meeting our national security needs and the legacy of the Cold War weapons programs. Reducing independent oversight would undermine the responsibility our government has to American taxpayers to achieve these critical national security objectives. Without it, success in these areas will be more difficult, not less.

This committee will continue its oversight of the nuclear weapons enterprise and DOE management, in order to identify the best avenues for reform in the interest of taxpayers, safety, and national security.

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