

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water  
FY 2015 Budget Hearing, DOE Office of Science  
March 25, 2014  
Dr. Pat Dehmer, witness

Transcript of exchange between Congressman Fortenberry and P. Dehmer on ITER

Fortenberry: Dr., I have some particular concerns I'd like to ask you. I assume in nuclear experiments that chaos is not a good thing, and yet I have delved a little bit into this ITER facility, the International Organization that runs this ITER facility, and it appears to be pretty chaotic, and I think that that is affirmed by the budget request which is lower for Fusion Energy Sciences, and then one particular sentence that you have in your testimony, it says "our present assessment of the international project is that it cannot, under current conditions, meet the most recent schedule put forward by the ITER organization". Is this a waste of money?

Dehmer: No. That's not our position. You know, as I said at the beginning, the United States, the administration, maintains its commitment to the agreements that we made in 2006, the Joint Implementing Agreement. I've built a lot of projects in my years in the Department of Energy. I spent 12 years as the director of Basic Energy Sciences, building very large projects, the Spallation Neutron Source and several others, and I know that projects run into trouble, and the Management Assessors Report on ITER, has indicated that ITER is now in one of those periods. What we expect is for the ITER Organization to accept the recommendations of the Management Assessors Report, to create a corrective action plan, and to begin to implement that corrective action plan, and, at that point, I think it's possible for this project to turn around and build ITER. But at this point, the \$150M request is what we believe is an appropriate request for this project, at this moment in time.

F: I'm sorry if I'm confused about the number. I'm reading \$225M?

D: No, that was

F: This year's implemented number?

D: In 2014?

F: Yes.

D: In 2014 the number is \$200M.

F: And it will drop to 150?

D: Correct.

F: Ok, I guess the point then is affirmed that, here we are, lowering our commitment because we're basically suggesting that the organizational structure, and the trajectory toward some outcome here, appears less and less probable. Is this money better invested elsewhere? Should this be revisited? This is a lot of money.

D: This is a lot of money. I think this year, under these circumstances, \$150M is the correct request.

F: OK, are we putting a band-aid over something that's bleeding?

D: No,

F: And then next year we'll have another consideration as to whether or not we're going to be a part of this at all? And when is the projected project conclusion? 2024? Did I read that correctly in another article?

D: I don't know what article you're referring to, but the ITER Organization has committed to provide a baseline, which is the schedule, for the project, by summer of next year, by summer of 2015. I don't particularly want to preclude, you know, obviate their work, by suggesting what an end date might be for first plasma.

F: OK, then that's when it gets hard for decision makers, because we're committed to something that appears to be open-ended, is not going well at the moment, there is no defined outcome... I recognize this is experimental in nature, and it's got international ramifications. When did this start, and when were the initial assessments that we would actually have some conclusive data or project that was usable, implementable? Because it was a lot earlier than this.

D: I'm sorry I don't understand the question, when

F: When did the organization start, and when were the initial timelines

D: The ITER Organization

F: and projections for outcomes?

D: The ITER Organization became an organization in 2007. And the

F: But the idea was much earlier than this.

D: Oh yes! Yes.

F: And I assume money spent on it much earlier than this.

D: We rejoined, the United States rejoined the ITER organization at that time. We had been in it much earlier.

F: And then suspended our membership? And why did we do that?

D: I think... I'm not a historian in this particular case, but I believe because the, you know, the design and schedule

F: So we're bumping maybe perhaps into the same problem here.

D: I think it's a very different project at this moment in time, than it was at the time we got

F: What is it going to produce, and when?

D: It's going to produce ITER, which is the first world-wide experiment to create a burning plasma, and probably the earliest, my personal guess, not an administration guess, is late 2023. But again, the ITER Organization has committed to provide us with a baseline by summer of next year.

F: Do we have some sort of probability assessment of what a 2023 outcome is going to look like, and then how much money will we project to have spent by then on this?

D: So last year, when we submitted the 2014 budget, we said that we would spend up to \$225M a year, up to \$2.4B, but we would reassess as we approach first plasma.

F: Who are the largest contributors to this?

D: The EU is the largest contributor.

F: And how much do they contribute?

D: They have 45% of the project, and the other members have 9.09% each.

F: So we contribute 9% to the total.

D: Correct.

F: All right. Thank you Mr. Chairman.