
Trump DOE chief suggests 100% renewable energy is possible

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Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette suggested Thursday that the United States could eventually use entirely renewable energy, a rare acknowledgment from an official representing the Trump administration, which has sought to boost production of fossil fuels.

Brouillette was testifying at a congressional hearing on the Energy Department's fiscal year 2021 budget request. The proposed budget seeks to boost the development of energy storage technologies that can hold excess wind and solar energy for use when the sun isn't shining and wind isn't blowing.

The budget contains \$97 million for an "Energy Storage Grand Challenge" that would fund development of long-duration, or grid-scale, batteries that could store wind and solar power for a longer period than possible with current technology.

"We need to get to grid-scale battery storage," Brouillette said to an energy subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. "That allows people to move even further, perhaps even to one day where we achieve a goal of 100% renewables. Who knows. We can't do it today. We are going to be fully committed to this."

Brouillette, however, also said the U.S. must develop advanced forms of smaller zero-carbon nuclear reactors to fully decarbonize the grid, meaning he doesn't think renewable energy can do it alone.

"For us to maintain any ability to decarbonize the economy, we must have this type of power coming online," Brouillette said.

Still, Brouillette's statement is a far cry from rhetoric used by President Trump, who mocks wind and solar energy as unreliable because of their intermittency and doesn't acknowledge the need to reduce emissions to combat climate change.

Despite Brouillette's commitment to clean energy, Democrats at the hearing criticized the White House's proposed budget cuts for the Energy Department.

The budget calls for an 8% cut to the Energy Department, but the remaining funding skews heavily toward nuclear weapons and defense programs. The agency's innovation and science programs would undergo a 29% cut, while DOE's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Office would decline by 74%.

"This will limit America's future by eliminating programs critical to meeting our future energy needs and ensuring our nation's security," said Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur of Ohio.
