

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ENERGY

April 25, 2023  
10:12 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative George Rauscher, Chair  
Representative Tom McKay  
Representative Stanley Wright  
Representative Mike Prax  
Representative Calvin Schrage  
Representative Ashley Carrick

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Josiah Patkotak

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: OVERVIEW: ARCTIC ENERGY OFFICE

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ERIN WHITNEY, PhD, Director  
Arctic Energy Office  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Arctic Energy Office Introduction."

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:15:50 AM](#)

**CHAIR GEORGE RAUSCHER** called the House Special Committee on Energy meeting to order at 10:12 a.m. Representatives Prax and Rauscher were present at the call to order. Representatives McKay, Wright, Carrick, and Schrage arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**PRESENTATION: OVERVIEW: ARCTIC ENERGY OFFICE**

10:17:06 AM

CHAIR RAUSCHER announced that the only order of business would be a presentation, titled "Overview: Arctic Energy Office."

10:18:12 AM

ERIN WHITNEY, Ph.D., Director, Arctic Energy Office, U.S. Department of Energy (DoE), presented the PowerPoint, titled "Arctic Energy Office Introduction" [hard copy included in the committee packet.] She gave a brief overview of the context for the Arctic Energy Office (AEO). She stated that natural, economic, and political environments in the Arctic region are changing, and many different national, commercial, and indigenous stakeholders are involved. She said that AEO's vision is to connect the Arctic with DoE to meet the energy, scientific, and security needs of the U.S. and its Arctic allies. She stated that DoE seeks to combat climate change, promote energy justice, facilitate an energy transition, and create clean energy jobs in the Arctic.

10:22:00 AM

DR. WHITNEY, moving to slide 4 and slide 5, stated that AEO had been re-established in 2019 so it could advertise for domestic energy, science, and national security issues in the Arctic. She stated that in 2021 the omnibus funding bill directed DOE to continue focusing on issues in the Arctic. She stated that AEO is comprised of experts in engineering, international relations, scientific research, military relations, and tribal consultations. She added that AEO supports DOE policies and programs by working with Arctic stakeholders to advance Arctic energy transition.

10:24:04 AM

DR. WHITNEY, moving to slide 6 through slide 8, stated that AEO is advancing research in several different areas of energy generation. She pointed out that research for the increased efficiency in microgrids is ongoing, in addition to upcoming projects using fossil fuel, geothermal, nuclear, solar, and wind generation. She said that funding has been awarded to Launch Alaska to advance electric vehicle usage in the state. She stated that AEO supports the efforts of several DOE projects in Alaska, including atmospheric radiation measurement, the

Exascale Earth System Model and the Next-Generation Ecosystem Experiments. She stated that a February 2023 report on the Arctic found that the infrastructure needs to be modified to fit changing conditions and advance the understanding of how the Arctic impacts the global economy.

[10:28:24 AM](#)

DR. WHITNEY, moving to slide 9 and slide 10, gave a brief overview of the security focuses of AEO. She noted that AEO supports national energy security by promoting science, technology, engineering, and math initiatives in the Arctic by collaborating with the U.S. State Department's Arctic coordinator and the White House Arctic Executive Steering Committee. She said that in 2022 a National Strategy for the Arctic Region (NSAR) was created. She highlighted that the plan had significant input from AEO and emphasized the increasing economic and national security importance of the Arctic.

[10:30:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WRIGHT questioned who is involved in NSAR.

DR. WHITNEY answered that it is a multi-agency effort headed by the White House Arctic Executive Steering Committee. She offered to follow up to the committee with the list of the approximately 40 people on the committee. In response to a follow-up question, she said most federal departments have some involvement, including DoE, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In response to a follow-up question, she expressed uncertainty about whether there are other Alaskans on the committee.

[10:32:56 AM](#)

DR. WHITNEY, moving to slide 11 and slide 12, continued her overview of NSAR. The strategy promotes sustainable economic development, including a deep draft harbor in Nome, Alaska. It also supports the development of renewable energy sources and improving access to affordable energy. She said that DoE seeks to advance decarbonization while increasing resilience, and it seeks to advance scientific understanding of the challenges being faced in Alaska's Arctic region, which in turn will increase national security in the Arctic.

[10:36:11 AM](#)

DR. WHITNEY, moving to slide 13 and slide 14, stated that DoE awarded \$221,441 for state energy programs from 2015 through 2018, and an additional \$1,220,420 was awarded for state energy programs from 2018 through 2022. She said that grants for the Weatherization Assistance Program resulted in 1,299 homes becoming weatherized, 289 jobs being created or retained, and 14,489 people being impacted by energy efficiency improvements. She displayed a list showing the various interagency and international agencies and organizations that DOE is working with to meet its Arctic goals.

[10:39:31 AM](#)

DR. WHITNEY, moving from slides 15 to 17, stated that AEO's presence in Alaska has opened research opportunities with national labs. She stated that in order to improve research in Alaska, AEO tracks the expertise and resources of other labs relative to the needs in the state. She stated that AEO has responsibility for a small amount of airspace near Oliktok, which is the site of an important Arctic research center. The future priorities of AEO include facilitating partnerships with other federal agencies, organizing and working toward DoE funding opportunities, and communicating the value of Arctic energy projects in regard to national security priorities. She added that AEO has facilitated webinars to spread awareness of those federal funding opportunities.

[10:45:02 AM](#)

CHAIR RAUSCHER asked what role AEO has in maintaining the Oliktok airspace.

DR. WHITNEY answered that it simply monitors activity. In response to a follow-up question, she answered that it is not her personal role. Concerning DoE's budget, she expressed uncertainty of its overall budget. She added that AEO has a budget of \$2 million annually.

[10:48:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether AEO is considering Alaska's coal resources.

DR. WHITNEY answered that AEO is taking an "all of the above approach" to energy, including fossil fuels. She said that AEO seeks to pair coal with environmental management technologies.

In response to a follow-up question, she said that AEO is Alaska's voice within DoE. She stated that AEO communicates the needs and challenges of Alaska with the department. She added that some of those needs are specific to different tribal entities.

[10:54:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked how DoE is involved in infrastructure projects, such as the harbor in Nome.

DR. WHITNEY answered that DoE provides advice to these projects, and its role is continuing to evolve. In response to a follow-up question, she said that DoE continues to have discussions with other departments and agencies in order to create a defined role.

[10:57:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WRIGHT expressed concern over the lack of input from Alaskans on NSAR.

DR. WHITNEY expressed the same concern and said that she would gather a list of individuals who had worked on creating the plan.

[11:00:18 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Energy meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.