

**“Workshop on the Nation’s Needs for
Isotope: Present and Future”
DOE/Office of Nuclear Physics
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I am speaking to you today in the place of Dr. Marburger, Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Science Advisor to the President. Unfortunately, his health situation precludes him from being here today. But I bring his greetings – he would have liked very much to have been here.

Dr. Orbach has described the importance of the Isotope Production and Applications program. Let me assure you that Dr. Marburger and our office agree – we consider this program to be vitally important.

Over the past few years OSTP has become increasingly concerned about the state of the Federal isotope program. Many of these concerns are articulated in the National Academies’ recent report on the State of the Science of Nuclear Medicine. We have been concerned about the difficulties that research scientists in Nuclear Medicine and in many other fields face in procuring short-lived high-energy radioisotopes, and the lack of a reliable domestic supply. We have been concerned about the decreasing opportunities to develop new research isotope applications, and the long-term effects this will have in many fields. And we have been concerned about the lack of stewardship for strategic planning and coordination between the agencies. I know these concerns are shared by many of you.

DOE’s transfer of the Isotope Program to the Office of Science and the dedicated funding for the development of research isotopes are important first steps in addressing these problems. Moving the Isotope Production program to the Office of Science brings researchers closer to the producers to reinvigorate the science of isotopes. Moving the program to Nuclear Physics connects the physicists who have intimate knowledge of the reactors and accelerators with the process of isotope development to exploit the technological possibilities and enable future innovation. The funds dedicated to isotope development are a small start for a research program that will hopefully grow.

Dr. Marburger described to me how he first became aware of the importance of the isotope program when he was Director of Brookhaven National Laboratory. He watched the Medical Imaging program there, and particularly their PET program. The program leveraged expertise from the Physics programs – the particle accelerators, the detector technology development, and the imaging software and computing capabilities - to develop

innovative radiotracer technology for nuclear medicine. He says that this program first taught him about the difficulties and challenges of working with short-lived radioisotopes, as well as the extraordinary promise of radiotracers.

Dr. Marburger's first exposure to the issues of radioisotopes was in the context of Nuclear Medicine. But both the current use of isotopes and their future applications are much broader. This is apparent in the extraordinary diversity of participants in this workshop. It's truly amazing how many different fields are or may be served by the new Isotope Production and Applications Program.

While this speaks to the significance of the program it also hints at the challenges that the program faces. There aren't established mechanisms for all these different groups – for all of you - to work together. We will have to find ways of communicating and balancing the needs of so many different fields. This program is small – it will hopefully grow, but it is starting out small. The whole program is less than \$20M with most of that dedicated for infrastructure. If individual interests are allowed to dominate, the program will not survive. Let me be more clear – earmarks will devastate this program! This needs to be a science-driven, community-prioritized program. I urge you to work together to build a balanced and stable program, to work within the prioritization system that DOE will establish to make this a robust, mutually beneficial, and growing program.

We are at the beginning. Developing the Isotope Production and Applications Program and growing it will take time and considerable effort. There are obviously constraints both in terms of the available funds and the costing regulations. We shouldn't expect things to be easy. But we at OSTP are excited about the process that the Office of Science and Nuclear Physics are beginning to develop this program. This workshop demonstrates a commitment to developing a balanced program that will serve the needs of a very broad science community. There is a long way to go to realize the full potential of this program, but this is an exciting first step. I am optimistic. I look forward to hearing your ideas today and in the future.

Thank you.