

House Science Committee Oversight Agenda – 108th Congress

Energy Subcommittee Oversight Agenda – 108th Congress

Topics

Energy Policy and the Role of Energy R&D

High energy prices and potential conflict in the Middle East continue to place energy on the front burner of the Nation's agenda. The Administration and the House and Senate leadership have identified energy legislation as one of their highest priorities for the 108th Congress. A major component of such legislation will be Energy R&D and improving the reliability and efficiency of our energy infrastructure through enhanced R&D. The goal will be to help develop a balanced portfolio of energy research programs within the Department of Energy, including fossil, nuclear, renewable and efficiency programs.

DOE Laboratories

DOE's laboratory complex—funded at about \$6 billion annually—originated during World War II with the establishment of the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb and grew during the Cold War. Today's complex of laboratories provides a wide range of R&D capabilities in numerous locations around the country. Management of the laboratories is divided among several organizational elements within DOE and administered by different non-governmental contractors. Recent problems at Los Alamos in controlling and monitoring government purchasing practices and ensuring security of equipment highlight the need for oversight. Also, calls for external regulation worker and nuclear safety practices at the labs will require committee oversight. Finally, the committee will examine the need for action to address the continuing deterioration of the laboratories' aging infrastructure.

DOE Organizational Issues

DOE's organizational structure, which includes a dozen headquarters program offices, numerous major field offices and over 50 major government-owned-contractor-operated facilities, has been undergoing extensive reorganization. Major reorganization plans for the Office of Science and the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy have been announced and are underway. The committee will monitor the effectiveness of such reorganization plans to ensure they maximize productivity and minimize overlap and duplication and that they result in overall program efficiency.

Hydrogen R&D Initiative

The Administration's FreedomCAR program, announced last year, and Hydrogen Fuels initiative, announced earlier this year, will provide significant additional Federal funding and direction for R&D into hydrogen as a preferred fuel for the Nation's economy. Hydrogen has the potential to provide a cleaner, more efficient source of fuel to power the economy than the fossil fuels used for almost 90 percent of our energy supply. Major research efforts will be required to ensure that vehicle and stationary source

technologies come on line quickly, along with the infrastructure needed to allow their development. The committee will examine whether the Administration's research plan and program goals are adequate to ensure an efficient transformation to a hydrogen-based economy.

Nuclear Fusion

The Administration recently announced plans to reenter international negotiations leading to the development of the International Thermonuclear Energy Reactor (ITER). The project is a major step toward the long-range goal of developing clean and abundant power from nuclear fusion. The Committee will examine the role the United States should play in such negotiations, including the relative U.S. contribution towards ITER, the form such contribution should take, the impact such a large-scale international project would have on a domestic fusion science program, the pace of the international fusion research effort and the contributions of other countries to such an experiment.

Energy Aspects of Climate Change

The Subcommittee, in conjunction with the Subcommittee on Environment, Technology, and Standards, will continue to monitor Federal R&D and Technology programs to address climate change issues. This would include ensuring that existing Federal energy technology programs are adequate and properly focused to meet potential global warming challenges.

Contract Management

DOE programs have come under frequent scrutiny for contract management practices. GAO designated DOE's contract management as a high-risk area in 1990 and continues to identify areas for the potential for fraud, waste and abuse. The DOE's Inspector General and the national news media have also identified problems.

Results Act and Management Tools

The Subcommittee will examine the use of Government Performance and Results Act principles and other management performance tools to review DOE programs, performance plans, and budgets.

Future Science Facility Needs

There are a number of science facility upgrades being planned or proposed for existing user facilities to meet the challenges of tomorrow's energy science R&D programs, which would be reviewed.

Environment, Technology, and Standards Subcommittee Oversight Agenda – 108th Congress

Topic

Transportation R&D

The Subcommittee will conduct oversight hearings into surface transportation research and development programs within the federal government, states, academia and interests groups. The hearings will provide the basis reauthorization of the research provisions of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (P.L. 105-178)

Climate Change Science Programs

The Subcommittee will conduct oversight of the Administration's multi-agency climate change programs. The Administration created a new management structure of what was known as the U.S. Global Change Program (USGCRP) and created a new Climate Change Science Program Office, headed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Subcommittee will also examine the Administration's Climate Change Research Initiative (CCRI), which is supposed to focus on priority areas of uncertainty and provide useful information to decision makers. The Subcommittee is concerned about coordination among the agencies, especially in areas of observations, computer modeling and data management.

Voting Standards

The Subcommittee will examine the establishment of the Technical Standards Committee (which will be part of the Election Assistance Commission created by the Help America Vote Act, P.L. 107-252) and its role, as well as that of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, in helping develop technical standard for voting systems and equipment. The Committee worked closely with the House Administration Committee to include these provisions in the Help America Vote Act.

World Trade Center

The Subcommittee will conduct oversight of the ongoing investigation by the National Institutes of Standards and Technology into the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The Subcommittee will also examine the implementation of the National Construction Safety Team Act (P. L. 107-231).

Technology Administration

The Subcommittee will examine the Administration's proposal to move the National Telecommunications Information Administration and the e-commerce duties of the International Trade Administration into the Technology Administration. The Subcommittee will also work with the Space Subcommittee to examine efforts by the Administration to move the Office of Space Commercialization out of the Technology Administration. The CyberSecurity Act that passed in the 107th Congress included provisions forbidding such a move.

Science at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The Subcommittee will continue to conduct oversight of EPA's management of science and its use of science in decision making. In particular, the Committee will examine how the Administration's initiative to better integrate science into the regulatory decision-making process is being implemented.

Satellite Programs at the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

The Subcommittee will continue to conduct oversight into NOAA's current and future satellite programs. Emphasis will be on NOAA's next generation polar orbiting satellite program (NPOESS) and the upcoming new geo-stationary satellite program (GOES-R). The Subcommittee will also continue to examine NOAA's problems in management and storage of the satellite and weather data that are critical to forecasts and research.

Climate Science at NOAA

The Subcommittee will also examine the climate change research and services programs at NOAA. The Subcommittee will focus on the goals and implementation of these programs with particular emphasis on observations, modeling and data management.

Research Subcommittee Oversight Agenda – 108th Congress

Topics

Science and Math Education

The Subcommittee intends to continue to oversee National Science Foundation (NSF) programs aimed at improving math and science education at the K-12, undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral levels, in particular the implementation of education provisions passed as part of Public Law 107-488.

Academic/Industry Partnerships

The Subcommittee will review the effectiveness of academic/industry partnerships.

Technology Transfer

The Subcommittee intends to review how research efforts at universities are affected by the patenting and licensing provisions of the Bayh-Dole act of 1984. We will also examine other policy incentives to promote technology transfer.

Biotechnology

The Subcommittee will continue to monitor the progress of plant biotechnology research, particularly the Plant Genome Initiative at NSF, as well as the establishment of Plant Genome and Gene Expression Centers and plant biotechnology partnerships for the developing world authorized as part of Public Law 107-488.

Government-wide R&D initiatives in emerging fields (e.g. cybersecurity, information technology, nanotechnology)

The Subcommittee intends to review federal R&D programs in the above fields, and will likely move legislation to improve coordination of interagency activities in these areas.

Astronomy

Examine funding and activities of NSF astronomy programs.

Antarctic Research

The Subcommittee will continue close review of NSF's research activities in Antarctica, following up on Congressional Delegation visit to Antarctica in January.

United States Fire Administration (USFA) Assistance to Firefighters grant program

The Subcommittee intends to reauthorize activities at USFA, as well as continue to monitor the Assistance to Firefighters grant program as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is transitioned into the Department of Homeland Security.

National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP)

The Subcommittee intends to reauthorize this multi-agency earthquake mitigation program.

Department of Homeland Security Establishment

The Subcommittee will monitor the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in particular the responsibilities of the Under Secretary for Science and Technology. Also will review how non-security emergency response activities within FEMA will be affected by transition into DHS.

Research and National Security

The Subcommittee will continue to examine the challenges presented by prioritizing research activities during wartime, as well as examine the need to balance the desire for open scientific communication with the need to ensure research activities do not contribute to security vulnerabilities. This review may lead to a broader review of general research ethics.

Digital Millennium Copyright Act

The Subcommittee intends to consider the impact of research and publication restrictions on work arising from the anti-circumvention provisions of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Oversight Agenda – 108th Congress

Topics

Space Shuttle Investigation

The committee will conduct an investigation of the Space Shuttle Columbia accident. The primary focus of the investigation will be on policy. The committee will look at whether poor policy choices contributed to problems on the Shuttle program and what policies need to be put in place for the future.

Space Station

The committee will continue its oversight activities focused on NASA's management of the Space Station program. Specific issues include cost control, independent assessments, management reforms, and contributions from the international partners.

Space Transportation Program

The committee will examine NASA's new plan for space transportation. The committee will review the program to ensure that the requirements and goals are clearly identified and that management processes are adequate.

NASA Contract Management

The committee will review NASA's contracting procedures to ensure their overall consistency with existing federal guidelines promoting competition and outsourcing.

FAA Research and Development

The committee will review FAA R&D programs to ensure that they lead to improvements in FAA mission performance.

Agency Compliance with Congressional Directives

The committee will review agency compliance with legal direction provided to it by Congress.

NASA Research Grants

The committee will review NASA's research grants award process to ensure it is competitive and open to the widest segment of the scientific community.

Competitive Out Sourcing at NASA

The committee will review NASA's contracting procedures to ensure their overall consistency with federal guidelines promoting competition and outsourcing.

Aerospace Workforce

The committee will review the status of the aerospace industry's workforce and federal programs intended to ensure that the workforce remains capable of achieving national goals.