

## (February 28, 2007) Research, efficiency bills coast through House science panel

ENERGY POLICY: Research, efficiency bills

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The House Science and Technology Committee yesterday approved separate measures that would spur energy research, speed entry of building efficiency technologies into the marketplace and improve energy efficiency in metals manufacturing.

A Democratic committee aide expressed confidence the bills could see floor time in the near future, noting they progressed in the last Congress but did not become law.

One of the bills, H.R. 363, would authorize National Science Foundation and Energy Department grants to scientists and engineers at the early stages of their careers. The grants would run for five years and provide at least \$80,000 per year.

The NSF and DOE grants are designed to fund innovative and "transformative" research. The bill, called the "Sowing the Seeds through Science and Engineering Research Act," would authorize DOE to spend \$25 million yearly in fiscal 2008 through 2012 on its grants.

Elsewhere, the bill would require the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to create a National Coordination Office for Research Infrastructure. The new office would identify and prioritize deficiencies in research facilities and instrumentation in academic institutions and national laboratories.

The new office would be run by people from DOE and the National Science Foundation, and perhaps other agencies that support science, math and engineering research. The office would fund construction and maintenance of research facilities at higher learning institutions or national laboratories.

The original bill also authorized billions of dollars over five years in basic research funding -- in sciences, mathematics, computer sciences and engineering -- at several agencies, including DOE and NASA.

But a substitute version committee Chairman Bart Gordon (D-Tenn.) offered -- and the committee accepted -- did not include these authorizations. The congressman said they would instead be in the various agencies' other authorization bills. During the markup, he explained the measures were slimmed down to help ensure their way through Congress.

The committee also passed H.R. 85, the "Energy Technology Transfer Act," sponsored by Reps. Judy Biggert (R-Ill.) and Brad Miller (D-N.C.). It would authorize Energy Department grants aimed largely at transferring energy technologies into the housing sector.

This transfer would be achieved through creation of a "geographically dispersed" network of "advanced energy technology transfer centers." The grants for creating these centers would go to states and local governments, nonprofits, cooperative extension services and universities.

These centers would engage in education, outreach and demonstrations aimed at building and industry professionals, among other parties. Biggert's office says that while DOE and its national labs have helped pioneer many affordable efficiency technologies, there are not enough mechanisms for getting these technologies into the market.

The committee also cleared H.R. 1126, which would reauthorize the Steel and Aluminum Energy Conservation and Technology Competitiveness Act of 1988.

The bill would authorize \$60 million in DOE funds over five years for joint federal-industry programs to improve the energy efficiency and competitiveness of metals manufacturing. The program, commonly called the Metals Initiative, would also be amended to emphasize development of technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Ill.). He says the measure is crucial to stem job losses in the sector while improving environmental performance.

"While the steel industry is much more modern than a decade and a half ago, the pace of technology and the competition from overseas is relentless," he said in a prepared statement yesterday.