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The Solar Fuels Innovation Act (H.R.5638) and the Electricity Storage Innovation Act (H.R.5640) passed the House by voice vote this July. The bills, which require the Department of Energy (DOE) to carry out two new basic research initiatives, received bipartisan support.

The two initiatives include the Solar Fuels Basic Research Initiative and the Electricity Storage Basic Research Initiative, both of which seek to “expand theoretical and fundamental knowledge” with regard to controlling, storing and converting solar and electrical energy into chemical energy, respectively.

The acts authorize DOE to use \$150 million annually from fiscal year (FY) 2017 to FY 2020 to carry out the new initiatives. Of that total, \$100 million will come from within DOE’s Office of Science and \$50 million will come from the DOE’s Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE).

Although the bills moved quickly, Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) and Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) resisted the word “basic” in both bills, given ambiguity between “basic” and “applied” research and strong resistance from university professors on the distinction.

Rep. Lamar Smith defended the language in both bills, arguing that the private sector is better suited to conduct applied research and that “by investing limited federal resources in basic research, we can lay the foundation for tomorrow’s technology breakthroughs.”

The House proceeded to vote down Rep. Takano’s amendment to remove the word “basic” from both bills.

The Senate is not currently considering similar legislation.

Sources: American Institute of Physics, House.gov
