

House committee approves three bills supporting scientific research at the Department of Energy

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On May 23, the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology approved three bipartisan bills that support and expand science programs at the Department of Energy (DOE).

The Department of Energy Science and Innovation Act of 2018 ([H.R. 5905](#)) would reauthorize basic research programs in the DOE Office of Science at its [current appropriation](#) level of \$6.26 billion for fiscal year (FY) 2018 and at \$6.6 billion for FY 2019. During the full committee markups of the [FY 2019](#) appropriations bills, the House Appropriations Committee [approved](#) \$6.6 billion and the Senate Appropriations Committee [approved](#) \$6.65 billion for the Office of Science. H.R. 5905 outlines agendas and missions for specific program initiatives and the Office of Science overall. For instance, the bill directs the Office of Biological and Environmental Research to carry out research in various fields such as biofuels, global carbon cycles, and biological mechanisms of contaminant neutralization. It also instructs the Office of Science to establish four bioenergy research centers to conduct research on plant and microbial systems biology and genomics.

The committee also considered the ARPA-E Act of 2018 ([H.R. 5906](#)), which would expand the mission of the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) program beyond supporting research on energy technology to include research addressing environmental, economic, and national security challenges. This expanded mission would specifically include research on nuclear waste cleanup, greenhouse gas reduction, and energy efficiency and independence. The bill also states that ARPA-E does not provide funding for a project unless potential grantees demonstrate “sufficient attempts to secure private financing” or “that their project is not yet independently commercially viable.” Although the President’s FY 2018 budget proposal requested eliminating ARPA-E entirely and the House FY 2018 appropriations bill would have provided no funding for the program, ARPA-E was ultimately funded at \$353 million for FY 2018, a [15 percent increase](#) from the previous year. The President’s FY 2019 budget request again [proposed elimination](#) of the program. Nevertheless, the recently approved House and Senate FY 2019 Energy and Water Appropriations bills included \$325 million and \$375 million, respectively, for ARPA-E. The passage of the bipartisan ARPA-E Act of 2018 marks a potential shift in the House committee majority’s stance on ARPA-E, since the previous [ARPA-E reauthorization bill was not approved](#) by the Republican-led committee last year.

The third energy bill considered by the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, called the National Innovation Modernization by Laboratory Empowerment Act ([H.R. 5907](#)), would allow the directors of national laboratories enter into cooperative research agreements costing \$1 million or less. According to Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX-21), the bill “provides the labs with more flexibility and removes red tape that makes it more difficult for businesses to partner with the labs.”

Sources: Library of Congress; U.S. House, Committee on Appropriations; U.S. House, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology; U.S. Senate, Committee on Appropriations.
