

House subcommittee reviews three wind energy bills

June 26, 2018

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing to discuss three separate wind energy bills on June 26. A draft bill called the National OCS Renewable Energy Leasing Program Act would amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1331) to include a leasing program for offshore renewable energy. Another draft bill, the Offshore Renewable Energies for the Territories Act, would expand the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to pertain to United States territories, such as Guam, and establish offshore wind lease sale requirements. The third bill, called the Offshore Wind Jobs and Opportunity Act (H.R. 5291), would create a federal grant program designed to train and transition workers from other industries into wind energy.

In his opening statement at the hearing, Subcommittee Chairman Paul Gosar (R-AZ-4) explained that the current lack of an established schedule for offshore leasing for wind energy has led to uncertainty for the developing industry. Chairman Gosar also noted that many U.S. territories, as islands, are often dependent on imported fuels, and expressed his belief that the three wind bills under consideration at this hearing could provide a means to energy self-sufficiency for U.S. territories. Subcommittee Ranking Member Alan Lowenthal (D-CA-47) added that, due to the United States' consistent offshore winds and expansive continental shelf, our nation has an offshore wind energy potential that is equivalent to twice its current electricity generation capacity. Both members agreed that the U.S. currently lags behind Europe in wind energy by multiple decades and voiced bipartisan support for the industry as a whole.

Jim Bennett of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) testified at the hearing, expressing his general support for all three bills. However, he stated that a career training program as mandated by H.R. 5291 would not align with BOEM's mission and budget priorities. Bennett also advised that any leasing plan for wind energy should maintain flexibility to allow BOEM to adjust to regional demands and changes in technology. When asked by Ranking Member Lowenthal about BOEM's ability to grow the offshore wind industry with the potential \$3 million cut in the proposed FY 2019 budget, Bennett replied that BOEM can maintain the offshore wind energy program at its current budget and that he anticipates the industry will continue to grow regardless. What remains to be determined, according to Bennett, is the speed at which the industry will grow, since any potential expansions of the BOEM program will not happen as quickly without sufficient resources to keep up with the demand for leasing. "We're at the end of an eight to ten-year period in which the planning has been put in place and we're starting to get the steel in the water," Bennett stated in regard to the prospects of the industry. Randall Luthi, president of the National Ocean Industries Association, testified that offshore wind is projected to support 160,000 jobs in the US by 2050. Luthi affirmed that BOEM has laid down a good framework for the industry to build, but voiced that the industry can and should move faster.

Sources: Library of Congress; U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Natural Resources.
