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On July 17, two subcommittees of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee – the Subcommittee on Energy and the Subcommittee on the Environment – held a joint hearing to discuss the future of fossil fuel as a primary energy source. The hearing also focused on the Department of Energy’s (DOE) partnerships with industry groups to develop technology that aids in the management of carbon dioxide.

The hearing opened with statements of support for the DOE-funded fossil energy technology research projects and highlighted some their recent developments. Representative Marc Veasey (D-TX-33) and Science Committee Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30) highlighted the Fossil Energy Research and Development Act (H.R. 5745), which they introduced with Representative David McKinley (R-WV-1) in May to reauthorize the DOE’s Office of Fossil Energy and expand its research on carbon capture, sequestration and utilization technologies. Energy Subcommittee Chairman Randy Weber (R-TX-14) emphasized his support of carbon utilization and energy production technologies, such as a 3-D printed polymer developed at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) that converts methane into methanol.

During witness testimony, Dr. Roger Aines, Chief Scientist of the energy program at LLNL, highlighted DOE funded fossil energy technology projects, and emphasized the importance of national lab research-industry partnerships to integrate technological advancements into the fossil energy industry. Dr. Klaus Brun, Machine Program Director at the Southwest Research Institute, answered questions from committee members about the development of supercritical carbon dioxide power cycles, which replace steam and air used in conventional power plants with carbon dioxide. Brun explained that this development increases efficiency by 3 to 5 percent in conventional steam plants and is “on the verge of commercialization” with a 10 megawatt utility scale power plant opening in 2020.

Representatives Johnson and Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-1) voiced objections to the proposed fiscal year (FY) 2019 budget cuts that would slash the DOE’s fossil energy research and development activities by 31 percent. Representative Bonamici also remarked that “this administration has sent inconsistent messages about fossil energy technology” due to their conflicting agenda of supporting “clean coal” while proposing cuts to research that focuses on ways to make coal production cleaner.

Sources: E&E News; Library of Congress; U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.
