

President signs bill authorizing DOE Office of Science

September 28, 2018

On September 28, President Donald Trump signed the Department of Energy Research and Innovation Act (H.R. 589) into law after the House passed the bill by voice vote on September 13.

Originally sponsored by Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, H.R. 589 establishes the Department of Energy's policies for science and energy research and development programs. The bill contains three main legislative components: Laboratory Modernization and Technology Transfer, DOE Research Coordination, and DOE Office of Science Policy. The directives include the first comprehensive authorization of policy for the DOE Office of Science, including the creation of Energy Frontier Research Centers, Energy Innovation Hubs, and a Solar Fuels Research Initiative. It also addresses challenges associated with DOE's operation of seventeen National Laboratories, which are managed by six different offices, by providing specific guidance and directives on energy science research coordination and reforms to streamline management.

The comprehensive legislation was about 11 years in the making according to the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. Chairman Smith said the bill will encourage public-private partnerships to promote economic growth and establish key research priorities to advance technology development.

After the bill's introduction in the House on January 20, 2017, H.R. 589 quickly passed the chamber four days later. On March 6, 2018, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) introduced a Senate bill with similar language (S. 2503), which the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources approved favorably. The Senate passed the legislation by voice vote on July 23, 2018, after Senator Murkowski amended the bill to strike a fourth legislative component, Nuclear Energy Innovation and Capabilities, from the original text. The House agreed to the Senate amendment before passing the final bill on September 13.

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