

Bill encouraging private-public nuclear energy collaboration signed into law

September 28, 2018

On September 28, President Donald Trump signed NEICA, the Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act (S. 97), into law after the House passed the bill by voice vote on September 13. The bill, sponsored by Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), encourages partnerships between the Department of Energy (DOE) and private companies to develop new nuclear energy technologies. According to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources' report issued after consideration of the bill, nuclear power today relies on light-water reactor technology developed in the 1950s. Economic challenges created by large light-water reactors have resulted in renewed interest in advanced non-light-water reactors from the commercial sector. NEICA establishes the National Reactor Innovation Center (NRIC) to facilitate advanced reactor research. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that the implementation of this legislation will cost the federal government \$340 million over fiscal years (FY) 2018 through 2022.

"The passage of this legislation underscores the strong bipartisan commitment in Congress that nuclear energy must be maintained as a reliable, safe, clean and efficient part of our national energy portfolio," Senator Crapo said. "S. 97 will eliminate barriers to innovation within the private sector and strengthen collaboration with our national labs to maintain American preeminence in nuclear energy."

Several other bills to advance nuclear energy including S. 2795, H.R. 4979, H.R. 4084, and S. 512 have been introduced in recent years, but NEICA is the first to pass both chambers of Congress.

Earlier this month, on September 6, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) introduced a separate bill (S. 3422) that would establish advanced nuclear reactor goals and provide for the full operations of a fast neutron reactor by 2025. S. 3422, the Nuclear Energy Leadership Act, was also referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and currently awaits further consideration.

Sources: Library of Congress; U.S. Senate, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.
