

Senate lawmakers consider series of energy bills

November 30, 2018

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy met on November 29 to consider a series of energy-themed bills as Congress begins look toward the next session. The hearing considered fourteen pieces of legislation, including bills to provide for the full operations of a fast neutron nuclear reactor by 2025 and to change access to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Of the fourteen bills, S. 3618 is best poised to make gains before the end of the congressional session after having already been passed in the House. S. 3618, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve Reform Act, allows the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to be opened up to outside rentals from foreign governments and private industry.

The Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) is an underground storage facility spread over four sites in Louisiana and Texas, each of which stores crude oil in excavated salt caverns for a maximum total storage capacity of 727 million barrels (10 percent of U.S. annual consumption).

The House already passed a similar bill on September 25, H.R. 6511, which would create a pilot program to lease underutilized storage facilities in the reserve to private entities. Under current policy, the Department of Energy (DOE) may only lease those facilities to foreign governments.

The subcommittee invited Representative Joe Barton (R-TX-6), who introduced H.R. 6511, to provide testimony on S. 3618. “It would be a good thing for the private sector to utilize the unused space and it would be a good thing for the people of the United States because the money that would be obtained from leasing, some of that money could be used to update or modernize the SPR,” Barton said.

The subcommittee also considered a bill introduced by Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). On September 6, Senator Murkowski introduced S. 3422 to establish advanced nuclear reactor goals and provide for the full operations of a fast neutron reactor by 2025. The introduction of this bill coincided with President Donald Trump signing the Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act (NEICA) into law. NEICA, sponsored by Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), encourages partnerships between DOE and private companies to develop new nuclear energy technologies.

Other bills considered in the hearing covered topics as varied as grid infrastructure, liquified natural gas permitting, energy conservation in federal buildings, and re-refining used lubricating oil. Congress now has until December 31 to pursue further action on the discussed bills before the end of the current session.

Sources: *E&E News*; *U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Energy*; *The White House*.
