

Monthly Review: February 2011

This monthly review goes out to the leadership of AGI's member societies, members of the AGI Government Affairs Advisory Committee, and other interested geoscientists as part of a continuing effort to improve communications between GAP and the geoscience community. The current monthly review and archived monthly reviews are all available online. Subscribe to receive the Government Affairs Monthly Review by email.

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1. Congressional Visits Day in April and September—Sign Up Today

Geoscientists are invited to join organized groups of scientists and engineers for workshops and visits with congressional members and committees in April and September 2011. Decision makers need to hear from geoscientists. Become a citizen geoscientist and join many of your colleagues for a workshop at AGU headquarters followed by a day conducting visits with members of Congress or congressional staff on Capitol Hill to speak on the importance of geoscience research, development, and education.

April 6-7, 2011

Science-Engineering-Technology Congressional Visits Day (SET-CVD), a larger event for all the sciences.

September 20-21, 2011

Geosciences Congressional Visits Day (GEO-CVD), an event specifically geared towards geoscientists.

Please contact Linda Rowan by replying to this email or send an email to govt@agiweb.org for more information or to sign-up.

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2. Paid Geoscience Public Policy Summer Internship—Deadline March 15

The American Geological Institute's Government Affairs Program offers summer and semester internship opportunities for geoscience students (undergraduates and/or Masters students) with an interest in public policy and in how Washington impacts the geoscience community. Interns gain a first-hand understanding of the legislative process and the operation of executive branch agencies while enhancing their writing, research, and web publishing skills. Deadlines for online submission of applications are March 15 for summer, April 15 for fall and October 15, 2011 for spring 2012.

The American Geophysical Union, the Soil Science Society of America, the American Institute of Physics, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Chemical Society offer similar internships that may be of interest to geoscience students. Please visit their web sites or contact AGI at govt@agiweb.org for more information.

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3. President Releases FY 2012 Budget Request

On Valentine's Day, President Barack Obama released the administration's fiscal year (FY) 2012 budget request to Congress. An interactive graphic provides an overview of the budget proposal and the percentage of spending for various government priorities. The President's budget overview lists several key points including \$1 trillion in deficit reductions in the FY 2012 budget request and a five year freeze on non-security discretionary spending to reduce the deficit by \$400 billion over ten years. The key points are followed by five key sections titled Innovate, Educate, Build, Responsibility and Reform. Under Innovate, the request calls for \$148 billion for research and development (R&D) and making the R&D tax credit permanent. Under Educate, the request calls for maintaining financial aid for higher education and for preparing 100,000 new science, technology, engineering, and math teachers. Under Build, the request calls for improving infrastructure for transportation and improving internet access. Under Responsibility, the request calls for a freeze on non-security spending, plus cuts to community grants, Great Lakes restoration, water treatment plant funds, defense spending and other programs. Under Reform, the request calls for cuts on government travel and administration, reform through reorganization and embracing competitive grant programs such as "Race to the Top."

Turning to specific requests for geosciences R&D and geosciences education, the FY2012 plan calls for increases for the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Earth Science within the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and Renewable Energy and Science within the Department of Energy. The total budget for the U.S. Geological Survey would remain nearly the same as FY 2010, while funding for Fossil Energy, Environmental Management and Waste Management (i.e., Yucca Mountain) within the Energy Department would decrease.

The Geosciences Directorate (GEO) within NSF would consider several interdisciplinary initiatives in the President's FY 2012 budget request beyond regular funding of research and related activities. Major investments would include \$282.7 million (+\$87.2 million over FY2010/CR FY2011) for the Science, Engineering and Education for Sustainability (SEES) NSF-wide program, \$16 million (first time request) for Cyberinfrastructure Framework for 21st Century Science and Engineering (CIF21), \$10 million (first time request) for Creating a More Disaster Resilient America (CaMRA), \$13 million (-\$1.6 million below FY2010/CR FY2011) for a new Science and Technology Center and \$13.8 million (+\$1.2 million over FY2010/CR FY2011) for CAREER. SEES funding through GEO would focus on clean energy and technologies to help mitigate and adapt to environmental changes. CAREER funds would support young investigators who exemplify the role of teacher-scholars through outstanding research and education. Please see AGI Government Affairs NSF Appropriations webpage for more details.

The U.S. Geological Survey FY 2012 request is \$1.118 billion, which is an increase of \$6.1 million over FY2010. The request would cut funding for programs in earthquake hazards, geologic mapping, water resources and mineral resources. The request would terminate the data preservation and the water research science centers. The request would provide increases for climate change programs and Landsat. Please see AGI Government Affairs FY2012 Department of the Interior Appropriations for more details. The ultimate source for details about the USGS budget is the USGS budget office.

Please see AGI Government Affairs FY 2012 Appropriations Overview for more details on specific geosciences funding within these and the other agencies plus links to the relevant government budget offices.

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4. Obama Announces Report on America's Great Outdoors Initiative

Reiterating his call for Americans to enjoy the outdoors and conserve the country's wilderness, President Obama spoke on February 16 about the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative and announced the release of the initiative's report, *America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations*. Obama launched the initiative in 2010 to improve communication and integration among the federal government and stakeholders at the grassroots level. The report was a collaborative effort of the Department of the Interior (DOI), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). Leadership from each entity traveled around the country to attend public listening sessions to get comments from citizens. The report focuses on ways to connect Americans to the outdoors through careers and service opportunities; strategies to conserve and restore parks, green spaces, forests, waters and ranches; and efforts to make the federal government a more effective partner. A section of the report is dedicated to youth involvement with conservation and nature.

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5. Congress Debates FY 2011 Budget and Passes CR

The House began the first session of the 112th Congress with the unfinished budget for fiscal year (FY) 2011. The 111th Congress passed a continuing resolution [Continuing Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2011 (H.R. 3082)] in December 2010, keeping the government operating on the FY 2010 budget until March 4, 2011. The House introduced a budget bill, Full Year Continuing Appropriations Act of 2011 (H.R. 1), on February 11 and held a week of debate followed by passage of the bill by the House by a vote of 235-189 on February 19. The bill cuts discretionary spending by about \$60 billion (see Majority Leader Eric Cantor's summary of specific cuts) and restrains the Environmental Protection Agency from implementing many rules related to greenhouse gas emissions.

The Senate has not acted on H.R. 1 and many senators have indicated opposition to the measure because of the significant spending cuts and the language restricting EPA. In some cases, legislators in both chambers have expressed opposition to other components of the measure that they view as ideologically based and not related to appropriations.

On February 25, the House Appropriations Committee introduced a short term continuing resolution that would cut \$4 billion in discretionary spending and extend government funding at FY 2010 levels for an additional two weeks (ending on March 18, 2011). The full text of the legislation is available from the Rules Committee and the text shows the specific cuts. The measure passed the House on March 1. The Senate approved the short term CR and this will leave Congress with an additional two weeks to try to work out a compromise on the FY 2011 budget without shutting down the government.

Congress and the Obama Administration are trying to reduce the federal budget deficit. According to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) estimates, the federal budget deficit for FY 2010 was \$1.17 trillion, down from the deficit of \$1.7 trillion for FY 2009. The deficit in FY 2009 was much larger because of the \$700 billion government bailout of financial institutions (\$110 billion was repaid by institutions in FY 2010), the \$878 billion for the economic stimulus package, the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the bailout of General Motors and affiliated stakeholders plus tax cuts and a patch to the alternative minimum tax. OMB predicts the deficit will grow in FY 2011 to about \$1.3 trillion as the economy continues to experience a sluggish recovery and consensus on budget solutions remain elusive.

Congress and the Administration are trying to reduce the deficit by cutting discretionary spending. Discretionary spending for FY 2010 was \$1.3 trillion with the largest amounts going to security (Defense, Homeland Security and overseas operations; \$815 billion), Health and Human Services (\$84 billion), Education (\$64.3 billion), Housing and Urban Development (\$42.8 billion), Justice (\$27.6 billion), and Agriculture (\$25 billion). The rest of the federal government accounts for the remaining \$241 billion in discretionary spending. Non-discretionary spending for FY 2010 of \$1.95 trillion included \$701 billion for Social Security, \$446 billion for Medicare, \$276 for Medicaid, \$230 billion for other mandatory programs and \$414 billion for interest on the debt. U.S. debt is over \$14 trillion or about 95 percent of gross domestic product (\$14.7 trillion) for FY 2010. It remains unclear whether any of the proposed cuts by the Administration or Congress will help to significantly reduce the federal budget imbalance or whether the cuts are cost effective in terms of overall government efficiency and their impact on economic growth.

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6. Senate Committees Announce Subcommittee Leadership

The Senate Committee on Appropriations, led by Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-HI) and Vice Chair Thad Cochran (R-MS) announced the subcommittee leadership for the 112th Congress.

There will be twelve subcommittees with responsibility for appropriating funds for specific agencies and programs. The leadership has not been finalized, but below are the currently listed leaders and the jurisdiction of the subcommittees of most interest to the geoscience community.

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Subcommittee: Chairman Herb Kohl (D-WI) and Ranking Member Roy Blunt (R-MO) with responsibilities for research within the Department of Agriculture.

Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee: Chairman Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Ranking Member Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) with responsibilities for research within NSF, NASA, NOAA, and NIST.

Energy and Water Development Subcommittee: Chairman Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Ranking Member Lamar Alexander (R-TN) with responsibilities for research at the Energy Department.

Interior, Environment Subcommittee: Chairman Jack Reed (D-RI) and Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) with responsibilities for research at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Chairman Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) announced the subcommittee leadership positions for the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Key subcommittee Chairs and Ranking Members include Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and James Risch (R-ID) for Energy; Ron Wyden (D-OR) and John Barrasso (R-WY) for Public Lands and Forest; and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) will replace Debbie Stabenow for Water and Power, with Ranking Member Mike Lee (R-UT).

The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works will continue to be led by Chair Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Ranking Member James Inhofe (R-OK), and subcommittee leadership is set. The subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety will be led by Chairman Thomas Carper (D-DE) and Ranking Member John Barrasso (R-WY). Bernie Sanders (I-VT) remains Chair of the subcommittee on Green Jobs and the New Economy and John Boozman (R-AR) will be Ranking Member. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) continues as Chair, with Mike Crapo (R-ID) as Ranking Member, of the Superfund, Toxics, and Environmental Health subcommittee. The Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee will be lead by Chair Max Baucus (D-MT) and Ranking Member David Vitter (R-LA). Chairman Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Ranking Member Jeff Sessions (R-AL) will head the Water and Wildlife Subcommittee.

Chairman Jay Rockefeller IV (D-WV) and Ranking Member Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation announced the subcommittee leadership positions. John Kerry (D-MA) and John Ensign (R-NV) continue as Chairman and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet, respectively. The Subcommittee on Competitiveness, Innovation, and Export Promotion will be led by Chair Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Ranking Member Roy Blunt (R-MO). Mark Begich (D-AK) takes up the Chairman position for the Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard, with Olympia Snowe (R-ME) as Ranking Member. Bill Nelson (D-FL) will Chair the Subcommittee on Science and Space with John Boozman (R-AR) as Ranking Member.

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry have yet to announce their subcommittee leadership.

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7. Senators Introduce Energy Legislation

Senators introduced a new energy measure at the end of February. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), along with Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), announced legislation to improve energy efficiency standards for a wide range of consumer products including furnaces, air conditioners, refrigerators and washers and dryers (S. 398). "Greater energy efficiency saves consumers money, strengthens our economy, enhances our national security, creates jobs, and reduces environmental impacts," said Bingaman.

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8. Critical Minerals Bills Introduced

Senator Mark Udall (D-CO) introduced the "Critical Minerals and Materials Promotion Act of 2011" (S.383) on February 17. The bill would authorize several programs under the Department of the Interior (DOI) and Department of Energy (DOE). DOI, acting through USGS, would establish a research and development program tasked with compiling the discovered and potential for undiscovered resources of critical materials in the United States and other countries as well as analyzing the current and future critical materials domestic and global supply chains. DOE would conduct a program of research and development to strengthen the domestic supply chain of critical materials for clean energy technologies. Other programs within the bill promote development of a critical materials industry workforce through partnerships with higher education institutions and the establishment of an early warning system of potential critical materials and supply problems. The bill has been referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

On the House side, Representative Leonard Boswell (D-IA) introduced the "Rare Earths and Critical Materials Revitalization Act" (H.R. 618) on February 10 to promote the domestic production of REE's. The legislation, first proposed by Kathy Dahlkemper of Pennsylvania in the 111 Congress (H.R. 6160), aims to further research through a DOE program on advancing technology affecting REE mining, manufacturing, recycling and authorizes research to find substitutions for and use less of the materials. It has been referred to the House Science, Space and Technology Subcommittee on Energy and Environment.

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9. Congress Wants More Information about Yucca Mountain

Four members of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee sent a letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) on February 10, 2011 requesting information on the scientific and technical evaluation of the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste disposal site.

Committee Chair Ralph Hall (R-TX), Vice-Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Paul Broun (R-GA), and Energy and Environment Subcommittee Chairman Andy Harris (R-MD) sent the letter to each NRC commissioner asking for the immediate release of a yet to be released safety evaluation report on Yucca Mountain that was to be finished by August 2010. The letter says the report addresses post-closure scientific and technical issues associated with storing high level waste at the proposed repository. "Public disclosure of the report and the NRC staff's key findings is necessary to ensure fully informed consideration of science and technology policy issues surrounding this matter," the congressmen wrote. On February 24, House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI) and Environment and the Economy Subcommittee Chairman John Shimkus (R-IL) sent a letter to Secretary of Energy Steven Chu with a list of questions and requests for information regarding the Yucca Mountain project. One question asks whether Chu considers Yucca Mountain a geologically safe site for the disposal of nuclear waste and requests information regarding his decision. The congressmen inquire about the future of the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management; the application licensing process; and the financial status of the project. In the letter, the lawmakers write that they have an obligation to taxpayers to deliver a waste repository for which they have been providing money and to prevent the U.S. Treasury from paying damages to nuclear energy companies whose contracts with the Department of Energy to accept nuclear waste have been breached.

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10. House Members Question Hydraulic Fracturing

Representatives Edward Markey (D-MA) and Rush Holt (D-NJ), who serve on the House Natural Resources Committee, sent a letter to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar on February 28, 2011, asking for more information about hydraulic fracturing on public lands. Their letter reacts to a detailed New York Times story on possible human health effects of hydraulic fracturing and other recent stories and debates.

Hydraulic fracturing is used to extract natural gas from rock formations, primarily shale-based formations, by pumping in water and fluids that fracture the rock and allows the gas to migrate to extraction sites. The news story discusses high levels of radioactivity and other potential toxic substances that concentrate in the waste waters and may not be properly disposed of. Given the significant increase in the use of hydraulic fracturing throughout the U.S., there is growing concern about a significant increase in harmful waste water potentially contaminating drinking water and rivers.

Within days of the news story and congressional letter, a magnitude 4.5 earthquake in Arkansas increased concerns about possible connections between seismic activity and salty waste water pumping in the area. In Arkansas, hydraulic fracturing is used to extract gas and then the salty waste water is pumped into the abandoned injection wells. There have been more swarms of earthquakes in Arkansas since an increase of pumping over the past few years and the magnitude 4.5 earthquake was the largest event in about 35 years. The Arkansas Geological Survey, the New Madrid Seismic Network, and the U.S. Geological Survey have more information about seismicity in the state.

With significant discoveries of natural gas resources, which are cleaner burning, and concomitant increases in the use of hydraulic fracturing to extract the natural gas, there needs to be consideration of the most effective methods for dealing with the waste streams, while conserving energy and resources throughout the extraction process.

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11. House Energy Subcommittee to Host Hearing with Climate Scientists

The Democrats on the Energy and Power Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee sent a letter to the subcommittee chair Ed Whitfield (R-KY) requesting that climate scientists participate in hearings on greenhouse gas emissions regulations within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The subcommittee has been holding hearings related to legislation, but according to Democratic members of the subcommittee, their requests to have climate scientists participate have been denied. The Democrats are concerned that recent hearings have called into question the science regarding climate change without having any scientists respond or present testimony.

Chairman Whitfield has indicated that the subcommittee will organize a hearing with a panel of climate scientists for March 8, 2011.

In related news, Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI), Subcommittee Chair Ed Whitfield (R-KY) and Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) filed an amicus brief in a court case that questions judicial authority in making decisions about greenhouse gas emissions. Republicans in both chambers are questioning the authority of the judicial and the executive branches to rule on greenhouse gas emissions without legislation from the legislative branch.

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12. Representative Introduces Resolution in Support of Darwin Day

On February 9, Representative Pete Stark (D-CA) introduced H.Res. 81, "Expressing support for designation of February 12, 2011, as Darwin Day and recognizing the importance of science in the betterment of humanity." Stark chose February 12, Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) birthday, as a "time for us to celebrate the advancement of human knowledge and the achievements of reason and science." The bill was cosponsored by Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) but did not pass before February 12.

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13. DOI Will Look at Oil Shale Rules, Water Resources

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Bob Abbey announced on February 15 that the BLM will review the current commercial oil shale rules and plans issued in November 2008 under the Bush Administration. If necessary, DOI will update the rules depending on projected water needs in the West, the latest research and technologies, and cost. The review will look specifically at whether royalty rates for oil shale should be established only after more is known about oil shale technologies, whether future applications to lease should include specific resource protection programs, and whether aspects of existing regulation should be clarified.

Abbey stated that BLM, which recently solicited and reviewed nominations for research, development, and deployment (RD&D) leases for oil shale on public lands in Colorado and Utah, remains committed to helping companies take a bench-scale technology to commercial scale. GAO recommended in "Energy-Water Nexus: A Better and Coordinated Understanding of Water Resources

Could Help Mitigate the Impacts of Potential Oil Shale Development” that the USGS begin an analysis of baseline water resources conditions to increase understanding of how groundwater and surface water are affected by commercial oil shale activities. DOI believes that enough time exists for the review before a “commercially and environmentally viable method for development of oil shale” becomes profitable on a larger scale.

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14. Forest Service Announces Forest Service Planning Draft Rule

On February 10, the USDA released its proposed Forest Service Planning Draft Rule. The proposed rule would establish a fresh national framework to develop land management plans for the National Forest System that are more adaptive to stressors such as climate change and would increase public collaboration. No such update has been made on public land management planning procedures since 1982. The goal of the new rule is to create guidelines to protect water and wildlife while contributing to economic and social sustainability. Publication of the draft rule begins a 90 day period ending May 16, 2011 during which the public may comment on the proposed rule and draft environmental impact statement. Further information may be found at the Forest Service Planning Rule website.

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15. EPA Draft Plan on Hydraulic Fracturing

Details of EPA’s study of hydraulic fracturing have been made available with the release of their draft plan in February. The scope of the research, a “life-cycle” approach, has come under fire for being too large by industry officials and members of Congress. The study is expected to include both retrospective case studies, prospective case studies, and a thorough investigation of all substances used in hydraulic fracturing. The fundamental questions of the study ask how drinking water will be affected by large water withdrawals from the ground and surface water, by releases of hydraulic fracturing fluids, by the injection and fracturing process, by releases of flow back and produced water, and by inadequate treatment of the wastewater. Due to the timeline of the prospective case studies, the complete report will not be released until 2014 but EPA will compile an interim report to be released sometime in 2012.

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16. EPA Releases Report on Benefits of Clean Air Act

On March 1, 2011 the Environmental Protection Agency released a report on the benefits of the Clean Air Act. The Second Prospective Report looked at the results of the Clean Air Act from 1990 to 2020. According to this study, the direct benefits from the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments are estimated to reach almost \$2 trillion for the year 2020, a figure that dwarfs the direct costs of implementation (\$65 billion).

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17. USGS Requesting Comments on Strategy for Climate and Land Use Change

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is requesting comments and feedback on its draft report “USGS Global Change Science Strategy: A Framework for Understanding and Responding to Climate and Land-Use,” released February 9 and available for 60 days. The report is a 10-year strategy for the Climate and Land Use Change Mission Area which is one of six science directions developed by the USGS in 2007. The Mission Areas and related background information can be found on the USGS Science Strategy website.

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18. Report Clears NOAA of Fraud in Climate Email Debacle

At the request of Senator James Inhofe (R-OK), an outspoken climate change skeptic, Inspector General Todd Zinser of the Department of Commerce conducted a review of stolen emails from the Climate Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia to determine if NOAA was guilty of impropriety or fraudulent data manipulation. The Inspector General was to answer whether there was evidence of improper manipulation of data; dismissal of appropriate peer review procedures; or noncompliance of the Information Quality Act (IQA) or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Finding “no evidence” of any of the aforementioned offenses, the report’s findings are similar to many other conclusions reached by independent investigations into climate data research and stewardship. NOAA still must explain to Zinser and Inhofe why funds were transferred to CRU in 2002 and 2003, though their records show the funds were used to help support workshops to aid the governments of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam with their climate forecasting abilities. NOAA’s national and global peer-reviewed climate data are available to the public here.

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19. Chinese Court Rejects Jailed U.S. Geologist’s Appeal

A Beijing appeals court ruled on February 18 to uphold the eight year prison sentence given to an American geologist who was jailed for collecting information on the Chinese oil industry. Xue Feng claimed that the information was commercially and publicly available when he obtained it and was classified retroactively by the government. Xue has been in custody for more than

three years and was fined \$30,000 despite requests for his release and repatriation to the U.S. (See AGI's July 2010 Monthly Review on the topic.)

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20. Publishing Company Wiley Announces Open Access Journals

Publishing company Wiley, known for specializing in journals, books, reference works, laboratory manuals and databases, announced the launch of *Wiley Open Access*, a new publishing program of open access journals, on February 1. Three journals have been created for open access publishing of research outcomes, meaning authors pay to have their work accessed by users for free. *Brain and Behavior* will showcase research in neurology, neuroscience, psychiatry and psychology; *Ecology and Evolution* is set to publish research relating to ecology, evolution and conservation science; and an open microbiology journal is set to launch. Nature Publishing Group (NPG) has also expanded the number of its journals with an open access option. Dozens of NPG publications now allow researchers to self-archive articles for free or have their work published immediately for open access for a publication fee. More information and a full list of participating journals can be found [here](#).

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21. APS-MRS Report on Critical Materials

The American Physical Society and the Materials Research Society issued a joint report titled, "Energy Critical Elements: Securing Materials for Emerging Technologies." This report approaches the critical minerals and materials debate by only focusing on "energy critical elements" (ECE's) defined as rare earths and other elements critical to the development of new energy technologies. Discouraging stockpiling and heavy mining, the report recommends developing alternatives for ECE's and promoting post-consumer recycling of industrial and consumer products containing ECE's. "We can't mine our way to ECE independence," said Co-Chair Robert Jaffe, Professor of Physics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Instead we need to develop an integrated approach to securing the supply of these key materials." With China supplying around 95% of the United States' rare earths, a strong interest has been building this year on the Hill for solutions. Senator Mark Udall (D-CO) introduced a bill (S.383) in February with similar recommendations as those found in the report.

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22. Key Reports and Publications

*****National Academy of Sciences (NAS)*****

Understanding Earth's Deep Past: Lessons for our Climate Future

Released March 1, 2011. The National Research Council (NRC) has released a report identifying the value of the geologic record in helping to predict how the Earth's future climate would respond in an environment with high levels of atmospheric greenhouse gases. The Earth has two fundamentally different climate states called icehouse and greenhouse. Though for the past 30 million years the Earth has been in an icehouse state, characterized by waxing and waning ice sheets at high latitudes, a greenhouse state of absent or very small ice sheets has been more common for the past 600 million years. Ancient rocks and sediments could provide insight into various climate processes that we haven't observed in our current icehouse state. As part of the report, the NRC identified research to better understand the implications of a warmer world on the water cycle, sensitivity of the climate system, global heat transfer, sea level and ice sheet stability, and ecosystem thresholds and resilience.

*****Government Accountability Office (GAO)*****

Oil and Gas Bonds: BLM Needs a Comprehensive Strategy to Better Manage Potential Oil and Gas Well Liability

Released February 25, 2011. With the number of oil and gas wells on leased federal lands rising, GAO has released recommendations to improve BLM's current policies for managing potential federal oil and gas well liability. The report found that BLM offices, citing inadequate resources or higher priorities, have not consistently implemented their policies of reviewing bond accuracy and compiling and managing lists of orphan and idle wells. GAO recommends BLM develop a comprehensive strategy to increase minimum bond amounts over time and improve the data system to better evaluate potential liabilities and agency performance.

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23. Key Federal Register Notices

DOI—The Department of Interior has copies available of their "Policy on Integrity of Scientific and Scholarly Activities of the Department of the Interior" on their web site. [Tuesday, February 1, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 22)]

DOC—The Department of Commerce is seeking input on policy matters that can affect America's innovativeness and competitiveness as directed by America COMPETES Reauthorization Act. It is requesting comments on the Administration's Innovation Strategy, available [here](#). [Friday, February 4, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 24)]

DOE—The Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Advisory Committee (ERAC) is holding a meeting to advise the Secretary on research, development, demonstration and deployment opportunities within the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy

on March 2. [Monday, February 7, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 25)]

EPA—The EPA's Science Advisory Board Panel is holding a meeting to review the EPA's Draft Hydraulic Fracturing Study Plan. The plan develops research questions and aims to gather input from stakeholders; catalog potential impacts of fracturing on drinking water resources; and identify data gaps. More information is available at epa.gov/sab. [Wednesday, February 9, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 27)]

OSTP—The President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology has announced a partially open meeting on March 8, 2011 to be held in Washington, D.C. Topics covered at the open meeting will include defense nuclear nonproliferation research; advanced manufacturing; biodiversity preservation and ecosystem sustainability; and the first two years of undergraduate STEM education. Additional information and the agenda can be found at whitehouse.gov/ostp/pcast. [Thursday, February 10, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 28)]

NSF—NSF's Advisory Committee for Environmental Research and Education is holding an open meeting on March 16, 2011 at their Virginia headquarters to solicit advice and suggestions concerning research and education support. [Friday, February 11, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 29)]

DOE—The Basic Energy Sciences Advisory Committee in the Office of Science of the DOE is holding a meeting to provide advice and guidance with respect to the basic energy sciences research program. The meeting is March 17 and March 18 in Bethesda, Maryland and is open to the public. [Monday, February 14, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 30)]

DOC—The Advisory Committee on Earthquake Hazards Reduction will hold a meeting to gather information for the Committee's 2011 Annual Report of the Effectiveness of the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) on March 10 at the NIST building in Maryland. The committee is tasked with supervising NEHRP activities and assessing trends in science and engineering of earthquake hazards reduction. [Tuesday, February 15, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 31)]

USDA—The USDA has announced it will develop technical guidelines and science-based methods to quantify greenhouse gas sources and sinks from the agriculture and forest sectors and is interested in comments on its plan. [Friday, February 18, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 34)]

DOE—The Department of Energy will conduct a meeting of the National Coal Council in Washington, DC on Friday, March 18 to discuss the deployment of carbon capture and sequestration technologies. The meeting is open to the public. [Tuesday, February 22, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 35)]

DOE—The Department of Energy is re-opening the public comment period for its proposed amendments to its regulations governing compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The comment period will close March 7, 2011. [Wednesday, February 23, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 36)]

EPA—The Draft Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2009 is available for public review. The inventory of annual U.S. emissions contains estimates of carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFC), perfluorocarbons (PFC), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆) emissions by source category and sector. The inventory also includes estimates of carbon fluxes in U.S. agricultural and forest lands. [Wednesday, February 23, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 36)]

DOE—The Department of Energy (DOE) invites the public to comment on the draft DOE 2011 Strategic Plan. Comments are to be submitted on or before March 26, 2011. The draft plan can be found here. [Thursday, February 24, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 37)]

EPA—EPA is announcing the release of the draft report titled, "Aquatic Ecosystems, Water Quality, and Global Change: Challenges of Conducting Multi-stressor Vulnerability Assessments" and a 45-day public comment period for the report. This draft report investigates the issues and challenges associated with identifying, calculating, and mapping indicators of the relative vulnerability of water quality and aquatic ecosystems, across the United States, to the potential impacts of global change. [Monday, February 28, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 39)]

USGS—The National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) will meet on March 17-18, 2011 at the American Institute of Architects Building in Washington, DC. Members of the public who wish to attend the meeting must register in advance. Additional documents regarding the meeting can be found here. [Monday, February 28, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 39)]

NOAA—There will be a meeting of NOAA's Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) on Wednesday, March 9 and Thursday, March 10 in Washington, DC. See link for instructions regarding public comments. [Monday, February 28, 2011 (Volume 76, Number 39)]

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24. Key AGI Government Affairs Updates

- [Hearings on Education, Research and Development, and Workforce Policy \(2/23/11\)](#)
- [Hearings on Energy Policy \(2/23/11\)](#)
- [Hearings on Environmental Policy \(2/22/11\)](#)
- [Hearings on Nuclear Energy and Waste Disposal Policy \(2/7/11\)](#)

- [Hearings on Mining, Mapping, Soils and Other Surface/Subsurface Issues \(2/7/11\)](#)
- [Hearings on Energy Policy \(2/7/11\)](#)
- [Hearings on Environmental Policy \(2/7/11\)](#)

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Sources: Associated Press, AAAS, Environment and Energy Daily, Greenwire, New York Times, Science Magazine, National Academies Press, Government Accountability Office, Thomas, House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, the White House, Department of the Interior, and Environmental Protection Agency.

This monthly review goes out to members of the AGI Government Affairs Program (GAP) Advisory Committee, the leadership of AGI's member societies, and other interested geoscientists as part of a continuing effort to improve communications between GAP and the geosciences community that it serves. For additional information on specific policy issues, please visit the web site or contact us at govt@agiweb.org.

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