

WASHINGTON NEWS

U.S. and EU Agree to Joint Fusion and Non-Nuclear Energy Research

U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham and European Union (EU) Commissioner for Research Philippe Busquin signed agreements in May to conduct joint research in the areas of fusion energy and non-nuclear energy.

"As our agencies begin this cooperation in non-nuclear science and technology under the 1997 Science & Technology Agreement, we embark on a whole new era of collaboration," Secretary Abraham said at a signing ceremony in Brussels. "This arrangement provides us with an opportunity to pursue alternatives to our mounting energy demands and help secure our needs for the future."

The DOE/EU Implementing Arrangement in Non-Nuclear S&T (science and technology) is the first major legally binding agency-to-agency agreement signed under the 1997 US/EU Government-to-Government S&T agreement covering a wide range of potential cooperation in fossil energy, renewable energy, and energy efficiency with an immediate focus on fuel-cell technology and carbon sequestration.

Secretary Abraham said, "With the signing of the new umbrella fusion agreement, we look forward to continuing our many years of successful collaboration in the field of fusion research. This agreement also provides the opportunity to pursue new initiatives."

Areas of cooperation under the agreement may include tokamaks, alternatives to tokamaks, magnetic fusion energy technology, plasma theory, and applied plasma physics. Under the agreement, the U.S. Department of Energy plans to contribute \$1.3 million over two years to develop hardware for use at the Joint European Torus (JET) fusion device in the United Kingdom. The hardware will enable JET to enhance its performance and explore new areas of fusion science. Ongoing collaborations include research to improve understanding of the physics of newer, innovative approaches to fusion. The original umbrella fusion agreement was signed in 1986. The agreement provides for cooperation between the European Atomic Energy Community represented by the Commission of the European Communities and the U.S. Department of Energy.

House Science Committee to Offer IT Package

House Science Committee Chair Sherwood Boehlert (R-N.Y.) announced in mid-June that the Committee has begun work on an Information Technologies bill, which would authorize and coordinate

information-technology research across all the agencies in the committee's jurisdiction. The first hearing related to the bill was scheduled for later that month in the Research Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Nick Smith (R-Mich.). Rep. Boehlert said that the bill is expected to come before the full committee in late July.

The bill complements the House leadership's "E-Contract with America," released in June. In particular, Rep. Boehlert pointed to the document's pledge to ensure that the research and development was adequately funded. He said, "We must ensure both that federal funding is adequate to create a strong foundation of basic research for new innovations and that our tax system encourages strong private research and development."

Energy Secretary Defends Administration Budget Cuts Before House Science Committee

U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham testified at a House Science Committee hearing on June 21 that science and technology "will play a major role in meeting today's energy challenges." He singled out science and technology as a way to increase supply in an environmentally friendly manner and to boost efficiency while cutting energy demand.

Several members of the committee questioned the Administration's commitment to cutting-edge science, however, because of budget cuts. Science Committee Chair Sherwood Boehlert (R-N.Y.), said, "The general tone of the energy report was soothing and balanced, but the specific recommendations were often disconcerting and biased toward production. For example, the energy report talks about the importance of research on renewables and conservation, but provides no funding to carry out such programs."

Secretary Abraham defended the budget cuts by pointing out that the budget was completed well before the National Energy Policy Development Group made its recommendations. He also said that a department review of many energy programs would be completed shortly and that the President would use the review to develop further budget recommendations.

The review refers to one of the recommendations of the National Energy Plan in which the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy within the Department of Energy (DOE) is to undertake a strategic review of its renewable energy research and development (R&D) programs. When Secretary Abraham announced the review at the end of May, he said that the plan "highlights the important contributions

that can be made by renewable energy sources such as hydropower, wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass."

He said at that time, "I have directed that the review—in keeping with the priorities identified in the National Energy Plan—to also consider the promise of hydrogen, superconductivity, and other next-generation technologies. Hydrogen, for instance, when used to power fuel cells, emits no emissions other than pure water, which can then be recycled to make more hydrogen."

Secretary Abraham said at that time that he will propose appropriate funding of those R&D programs that are found to be performance-based and are modeled as public-private partnerships.

At the committee hearing, Chair Boehlert promised action to correct budget shortfalls in a forthcoming Science Committee energy package. He said, "Our bill will provide significant funding for research, development, and demonstration across the full range of energy sources—renewables, fossil, and nuclear. In short, our bill will reflect a balance that I fear is sorely lacking in the administration's own proposal."

On a positive note, Rep. Boehlert said, "The good news is that the administration has...gotten the nation to focus on energy policy....I look forward to working with the administration and with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to craft an energy policy that will address supply and demand, energy and environment."

Science Education Bill Clears House Committee

On June 13, the House Science Committee passed two bills that create grant programs at the National Science Foundation to encourage colleges and universities to run programs to improve precollege education. The bills are identified as H.R. 1858, the National Mathematics and Science Partnerships Act; and H.R. 100, the National Science Education Act. Committee Chair Sherwood Boehlert (R-N.Y.) said that the bills are likely to pass the House within the next several weeks.

Speaking specifically of H.R. 1858, Committee Ranking Member Ralph Hall (D-Texas) said, "The Committee has passed a very strong bill that includes many provisions designed to bring more support to our K-12 science and math teachers, their students, and their schools. Our aim is to help our children become much more proficient in science and math, and there are many programs authorized by this bill that will do just that." □