The Committee on Energy and Commerce
Joe Barton, Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives

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Subcommittee Panelists: R&D Program Will Help Meet Growing Energy Demands

WASHINGTON (April 29) - The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality today heard experts testify to the benefits of an aggressive research and development program to produce substantial quantities of natural gas and oil in the ultra-deepwaters of the Gulf of Mexico and the promising, complex onshore horizons in the United States.

"The continental United States has significant amounts of oil and natural gas in the ground, and beneath the seabed, that cannot be produced due to limitations on technology," said Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Hall, R-Texas. "The Ultra-deepwater and Unconventional Natural Gas and Oil R&D program is a fast-paced technology program led by industry and academic consortia with government and industry cost-sharing. Taking some advanced technologies off the shelf, and accelerating development of others could lead to increased domestic oil and gas production within three years.

The House-passed H.R. 6 established the Ultra-deepwater and Unconventional Onshore Natural Gas and Oil Research and Development program, which was designed to develop the technologies necessary to substantially increase the production of natural gas and oil in the ultra-deepwaters of the central and western Gulf of Mexico and certain onshore areas of the United States. Hall was the original author of the bill in the last Congress and co-authored with Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., this year.

Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, testified, saying that the provisions for ultra-deepwater and unconventional gas, "add significant new natural gas and oil supplies to help ensure our nation's energy security; provide for maximum industry input; pay for themselves; and maximize the value of federal resources in the form of additional royalties to the federal treasury."

According to the University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology, as much as 69 trillion cubic feet of gas could be produced between now and 2015

with the technologies developed by this program. These volumes are nearly one-half of the cumulative projected difference between demand and production by 2015.

"Offshore drilling and production platforms are so technologically advanced that one platform on the surface of the water can handle production from several different wells miles apart," said House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Joe Barton, R-Texas. "However, with all of the latest technologies, more research is needed as companies are forced into ever-deeper water to meet our nation's energy needs.

"Drilling at such depths will present a whole host of impediments to production that must be resolved through technology," Barton said. "American ingenuity will find the solutions."

One of the panelists, Dr. Arthur Weglein, director of the Mission-Oriented Seismic Research Program at the University of Houston, argued that the federal government should support research and development of this nature, for national and economic security.

"The technical challenges facing the large oil and gas producers in ultra-deepwater is of such a magnitude today, that they can and will, at some point, shift their investment and exploration portfolio toward other opportunities, e.g., the Mideast and Russia, where other issues are present, but not perhaps of such a daunting technical nature," Weglein said. "The interests of the United States in energy, national security and economic growth and stability dictate a maximum amount of domestic reserve and production and an overall diversity of sources of hydrocarbons. A U.S. government investment in ultra-deepwater R&D would, if carried out in an effective manner, help serve the near and long-term interests of our country."

Other witnesses included U.S. Rep. Max Sandlin, D-Texas; Howard Gruenspecht, deputy administrator of the Energy Information Administration; John F. Riordan, President and CEO of the Gas Technology Institute; and Dr. Michelle Michot Foss, Ph.D., executive director of the University of Houston's Institute for Energy, Law & Enterprise.

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Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials
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