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Congressional Hearing Summary
Overview of the Administration's Federal Research and Development
Budget for Fiscal Year 2012
House Science, Space and Technology Committee
February 17, 2011

Chair: Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX) ([opening statement](#))
Ranking Member: Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Witness

Hon. John Holdren, Science Adviser to the President and Director, White House
Office of Science and Technology Policy ([prepared statement](#))

Background

President Obama submitted his budget request for FY2012 to Congress on February 14, 2011. Dr. Holdren is the President's science adviser and is responsible for Obama Administration policy regarding all science and technology matters, including the federal research and development (R&D) budget broadly speaking. The hearing was about the entirety of the federal R&D budget, and it is notable that the space program was barely mentioned during the two-hour hearing. This summary is just about the space-related discussion along with climate change since NASA and NOAA research contribute to that field, although their activities were not the focus of the climate change debate. Other topics on which the Members focused included advanced manufacturing, technology transfer, STEM education, critical and strategic materials, energy research, nanotechnology, and scientific integrity. The [hearing charter](#) prepared by committee staff provides further background; a webcast is available on the committee's [website](#).

Nuggets

[Regarding climate change science], "We're just going to seek the truth."
Rep. Hall (R-TX)

[Out-year funding numbers for NASA] "are notional and shouldn't be taken seriously."
Dr. Holdren

"Why has NASA chosen to ignore the will of Congress?"
Rep. Sandy Adams (R-FL)

Hearing Highlights

This was the first full committee hearing of the newly renamed House Science, Space and Technology Committee since Republicans regained control of the House in 2011. That was the committee's name prior to 1995 when Democrats controlled the House. Between 1995 and 2010, it was called the House Science Committee under Republican control (1995-2006) and the House Science and Technology Committee under Democratic control (2007-2010). Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX), a former Democrat who has been a member of the committee since he first arrived in Congress in 1980, restored the word "space" to the title because of his strong interest in the space program.

Holdren said that the federal R&D budget overall would see an increase of 6.5% compared to the FY2010 appropriated level under the President's FY2012 budget request. The request would continue doubling the budgets of the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, and the Office of Science in the Department of Energy, though it would hold NASA at its FY2010 level "while funding every initiative" in the 2010 NASA Authorization Act.

Chairman Hall said in his opening statement that he thinks NASA is defying congressional direction in that Act with respect to the human spaceflight program. Rep. Sandy Adams (R-FL) later asked Holdren why "NASA has chosen to ignore the will of Congress" by requesting more for commercial crew but less for a Heavy Lift Launch Vehicle than was authorized in the Act. Holdren replied that the Administration believes it is following the law as best it can within available funds. Pointing out that Congress still has not passed the FY2011 appropriation bill, he said that the starting point for the FY2012 budget submission must be where the agency is in FY2011 and under the circumstances, the request is "responsible and appropriate."

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) mentioned in her opening statement that she wished NASA could have gotten more money, but did not press the point. Later she asked why the out-year projections in NASA's budget do not agree with what is in the President's budget request and inquired as to which was correct. Holdren replied that all the out-year numbers are notional and "shouldn't be taken seriously."

Climate change was the most contentious issue discussed at the hearing. NASA and NOAA satellites contribute to climate change research, but the conversation did not focus on those activities. Instead, Chairman Hall questioned the certainty of claims by scientists, including Holdren himself, about the cause and effects of climate change. Rep. Hall said the committee would simply "seek the truth." Committee member Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) went further and introduced for the record a list of 100 "prominent scientists" who he said had "serious disagreements" with conclusions that climate change is human-induced. He also sharply criticized Holdren for calling climate change skeptics "denialists," asserting that the only other context in which that term has been used is for those who dispute that the Holocaust happened. He asked Holdren if he really thought that was an appropriate term. Holdren said he never meant it that way and likely would choose a different word in the future.

In a later discussion with Rep. Sarbanes (D-MD), Holdren said that he had not seen Rep. Rohrabacher's list of 100 names, but that in the past such lists did not include climate scientists and insisted that over 95% of climate scientists agree that climate change is human induced. At the end of the hearing, Chairman Hall firmly but in a gentlemanly voice told Holdren that he should not dismiss Rep. Rohrabacher's list so quickly.