

Statement of Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Ranking Democratic Member, House Committee on Natural Resources
Before the Committee on House Administration
Wednesday, November 30, 2011

Chairman Lungren, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Committee, I am pleased to join with Chairman Hastings today to discuss the budget for the Natural Resources Committee.

As Chairman Hastings has noted in his testimony, when we appeared before you in March we presented a budget for the Committee's operations that represented a 5% decrease in the budget for the Committee in the 111th Congress. We felt that we would be able to carry out the Committee's work at this funding level by making cuts in our budget for field hearings and related travel.

The 6.4 percent reduction poses a real challenge for us. While we do expect to have some unspent funds at the end of the year, as Chairman Hastings has pointed out in his testimony, this is largely due to the fact that both of us had to hire significant numbers of new staff. In Chairman Hastings case, that was due to the transition from Minority to Majority status. In my case, it was due to the departure of much of former Chairman Rahall's staff to the Transportation Committee as well as the retirement of professional staff – which created a need for me to interview and hire new professional staff for the Minority. Both Chairman Hastings and I are both nearing the completion of that hiring process, and so we expect our staff budget for next year to be higher than this year's budget.

Further cuts in the Committee's budget could, as Chairman Hastings has noted, seriously impair our ability to hire and retain the skilled professional staff we need to support our legislative and oversight activities. It would certainly make it difficult, if not impossible, for the Committee to conduct field hearings in the many areas of the country that are directly affected by the laws and regulations within our jurisdiction.

Such cuts also could adversely affect our ability to efficiently process legislation referred to the Committee – much of which is noncontroversial and responds to real local needs and concerns, such as settlement of Native American land or water claims, adjustments to borders of public lands, or the protection of the historical, cultural and natural resources of the nation. Demand among our colleagues for approval of legislation within the jurisdiction of the Natural Resources Committee remains exceedingly high, and the Committee has a proven track-record of efficient, bi-partisan consideration of these measures.

To date, the Committee currently has reported, or ordered reported 76 bills, 16 of which have already passed the House, the remainder of which still await consideration by the full House – this represents the most reported bills of any Committee other than the Committee on Rules. About half of these measures have bi-partisan support, and each and every one of them has been the subject of a Committee hearing. In fact, our Committee has already held more than 100 legislative or oversight hearings this year. I would suggest that to the extent that Committee activities should meet the needs of Members and demonstrate bipartisan cooperation, this record shows the Natural Resources Committee to be an excellent investment.

I would also note that the Natural Resources Committee is at the very center of the energy policy debate. While we have significant differences regarding the details of a plan for American energy independence, there is broad agreement regarding the significance of this issue and the need for extensive oversight and legislative activity in this committee regarding our energy future.

With respect to the allocation of funds within the Committee, Chairman Hastings has, consistent with the prior practice of our Committee, allocated 1/3 of the personnel and salary budget to the Minority. We have continued the longstanding practice of the Committee to employ nonpartisan shared staff responsible for certain shared financial management, administrative, and support functions out of the 2/3rd share for the Majority. Thus far, we think this arrangement has been fair to both the Majority and the Minority.

In conclusion, thank you for your support for the work of the Natural Resources Committee, and for the opportunity to testify.

Thank you.