July 09, 2019

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chair
Committee on Science, Space and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairwoman Johnson and Ranking Member Lucas:

On behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council and its more than three million members and activists, we write to offer general support for H.R. 3607, the Fossil Energy Research and Development Act of 2019. If paired with strong reauthorizations of clean energy research and development programs, this bill could create a responsible approach to researching, developing and demonstrating technologies to reduce and reverse emissions from fossil fuel use and contribute to meeting our greenhouse gas emission reduction goals.

Last fall's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Special Report has made clear that to avoid the worst effects of climate change the world must limit warming to no greater than 1.5° Celsius, and that requires shifting without delay to a trajectory to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The build-up of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere has already caused about 1 °C warming. The human suffering and economic harms we are experiencing today from past emissions are already unacceptably high. The IPCC Special Report highlights the fact that we will need to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere in order to reduce current harms and human suffering and reach our climate goals. The Fossil Energy Research and Development Act of 2019 would, for the first time, fund much needed RD&D into carbon dioxide removal.

To meet the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, we need to prioritize a wide range of investments that will lower emissions, particularly energy efficiency, renewable energy, clean vehicles, and a stronger electricity grid. It is also essential to accelerate the decarbonization of remaining fossil fuel use. To this end, RD&D for technologies to reduce fossil emissions must align with our climate and environmental goals. Compared to current law, the Fossil Energy Research and Development Act of 2019 would create a better pathway for developing these technologies and is a step in the right direction toward a net-zero emissions trajectory.

The Fossil Energy Research and Development Act would update several Department of Energy Office of Fossil Energy programs last authorized in 2005 to better align with the environmental and energy priorities of 2019 and beyond. It updates the office's objectives and programs to focus on environmental mitigation. Critically, it directs the Secretary to prioritize technologies and strategies with potential for meeting the emission reduction goals laid out in Paris Climate agreement.

The bill would update and expand RD&D of carbon capture technologies for power plants and industrial sources, reflecting the need to develop decarbonization solutions for applications beyond coal-fired power. The bill also authorizes research into carbon storage, carbon utilization, improvements in efficiency, and rare earth elements and for the first time, carbon dioxide removal from the atmosphere and methane leak detection and mitigation, as well as atmospheric carbon dioxide removal, as mentioned above. These are important areas in which to develop and demonstrate solutions for decarbonization. The bill wisely includes considerations of environmental and landowner impacts, in order to minimize conflicts and reach better outcomes. These provisions are critical to ensuring that the Fossil Energy office's programs reduce environmental harms, not lock them in for decades to come.

Fossil energy research and development will not produce real world results unless paired with pathways to market adoption. The bill should correct provisions in EPACT 2005 that could limit consideration of publicly funded technologies when setting emission standards under the Clean Air Act. Millions of taxpayer dollars have already been spent developing decarbonization technologies, yet without a successful post RD&D policy framework we have not seen the needed level of deployment. New frameworks could be created, but existing ones should not be closed off.

To achieve the levels of emissions reductions needed to stave off the worst effects of climate change, Congress must make dramatic changes to its approach to energy spending. Clean energy investments must come first and foremost. A reoriented fossil energy RD&D program can play an important role both in reducing fossil fuel impacts in the near term and preparing to reach net-zero carbon emissions by mid-century. This bill is an important step in that direction, and we look forward to working with the committee to implement further improvements.

Sincerely,

John Bowman

Managing Director of Government Affairs
Natural Resources Defense Council