

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Johnson
Full Committee Markup – Amendment in the Nature of Substitute of H.R. 2484
HABHRCA Act Reauthorization
Thursday, July 28, 2011

Thank you, Chairman Hall. Today we are marking up Mr. Harris's Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute for H.R. 2484, *the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendments Act of 2011*. I want to commend both Chairman Hall and Subcommittee Chairman Harris for taking on this important issue with what could have been a good bipartisan bill. In fact, with the exception of a few new activities and an approach to funding that I will discuss in a minute, it is nearly the same as former E&E subcommittee Chairman Brian Baird's bill that passed the House last Congress.

However, in this Congress the Committee is supposed to be working within a new set of Republican protocols—protocols that, based on the markups we have had to date, appear to be increasingly difficult for the Majority to actually follow themselves. The outcome is more than just some procedural wrangling in Committee: it's also resulting in bad policy that, in reality, harms research activities that the sponsors profess to support.

We have seen the same pattern play out all too often this Congress—a bill is brought up that highlights the importance of a particular area of research, but then fails to authorize the resources the agencies need to continue the good work they are already doing. And then, on top of that, it further burdens them with new unfunded mandates.

I'm afraid that today's markup is continuing that trend. The issue before us is an important one—the need for continued research and public awareness of the increasing frequency and duration of harmful algal blooms and hypoxia, which are affecting more of our coastlines and inland waters than ever before. NOAA and the HABs research community have made great strides in advancing our understanding of harmful algae and hypoxia, even under already severe budgetary constraints. They have managed to achieve scientific discoveries that improve many of our coastal and inland water management practices, and have advanced our forecasting and early warning capabilities to minimize economic impacts and protect human health.

Given that, it is beyond me why we would not, at minimum, sustain authorizations for these research activities at their current levels. Despite acknowledging the risk of HABs and the progress this research has made, this bill makes even further cuts to already under-funded research activities, actually cutting back authorizations to lower than 2008 spending levels. I must ask, how does this help?

I cannot support such an approach to dealing with a problem that affects much of our country, including the Gulf Coast and the Florida Coast, the Great Lakes, the Chesapeake Bay, and indeed the continued safety of our drinking water nationwide. There will be constructive amendments offered today to correct the shortcomings of the bill before us today by giving Members a clear choice—either increase the funding to pay for the new mandates in the bill, or cut back on the mandates if we are unwilling to pay for them. That is just common sense and good fiscal policy, and I may have to oppose the passage of this bill unless one of the amendments offered by Mr. Miller today is adopted.

If we are going to say we care about this research, and that we care enough about the impacts of HABs to take action, then we actually have to invest in a way that will move this research forward and not further damage the capabilities of the agencies.

Thank you Mr. Hall and I yield back the balance of my time.