

House Dems float new rare-earths measure

Manuel Quinones, Environment & Energy Publishing, 4-5-11

Reps. Hank Johnson (D-Ga.) and Ed Markey (D-Mass.) have introduced the latest in a string of bills aimed at securing the U.S. supply of elements critical to advanced technology manufacturing and clean energy. Their legislation directs the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct a three-year comprehensive study of rare-earth elements.

"Without secure access to rare earth elements, we will be unable to lead the world in clean tech," Johnson said in a statement. "The RARE Act will dramatically advance our ability to access rare earths worldwide."

The U.S. Geological Survey already monitors rare-earth elements around the globe. But the legislation calls for a more in-depth analysis that could assess undiscovered deposits, analyze the supply chain and recommend further steps.

"From wind turbines to solar panels to energy efficient light bulbs, America needs a reliable supply of rare earth materials to manufacture our clean energy future," said Markey, the top Democrat on the House Natural Resources Committee, in a statement. "Unfortunately, we have gone from self reliance in the production of our rare earth materials to 100 percent reliance on imports, mostly from China."

China has moved to restrict its exports of rare earths, which has prompted congressional moves to secure a domestic supply of a wide array of energy critical elements. But experts are divided about the magnitude of the problem and how much lawmakers should be involved. There is some consensus on the need for more information (Greenwire, March 24).