

Lawmakers question USGS spending on climate programs

Pamela King, Environment & Energy Publishing, 3-10-11

Lawmakers on the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources met yesterday to evaluate the spending priorities of the U.S. Geological Survey. They didn't like everything they saw.

Subcommittee Chairman Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.) urged Marcia McNutt, director of USGS, to realign the \$1.1 billion budget with the agency's original objectives, saying he was worried USGS had stretched itself thin in trying to expand its mission from geology to other issues such as climate change.

"Considering the USGS now has responsibility for the entire world -- the rocks, waters, animals, air and space -- I must say madam director, it sounds like an incredibly daunting job," Lamborn said.

Republicans on the subcommittee asked why the budget was cut for projects such as natural hazard monitoring while the committee raised funding for climate change projects, which, the members said, had no immediate impact on human lives.

McNutt said climate change programs had in fact sustained a \$9 million cut. However, funding for natural hazard monitoring had to be cut as well, she said, likening the agency's budget decisions to deciding which fingers to cut off. She said she hoped most of the budget cuts would be absorbed in administrative costs rather than affecting vital projects.

Subcommittee ranking member Rush Holt (D-N.J.) outlined several concerns with the USGS budget: a lack of hydraulic fracturing data, the importance of understanding rare-earth minerals, cuts to USGS data preservation and mapping and, in the wake of the BP PLC oil spill off the Gulf Coast, a lack of regulatory safety for offshore drillers.

Holt called for the subcommittee to take action on recommendations that would assist USGS.

"Too few Americans know how much they depend on the work of USGS," he said.