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From Field Work to Field Hearings

Because this report is read primarily by earth scientists, I am sure that it comes as no surprise that one of my favorite parts of being a researcher was the field work. I lived for those opportunities. It was the incentive to keep going to the lab every day to process thousands of sediment samples and the reward for pleading with the lab instruments to *just please cooperate*. The hardest part of leaving academia for a career in program management, and now science policy, was leaving the promise of a lifetime of field work behind. I still hope that my last trip to Antarctica in 2004 wasn't actually my last.

While I no longer work in the field, my recent experiences with the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) have introduced me to the concept of the *field hearing*, which I think could go a long way toward filling my field-work void. Woodrow Wilson once said, "Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work." There are several different kinds of Congressional Committee hearings that serve specific purposes. Each is described in more detail below, as defined by Koempel and Schneider in the Congressional Deskbook¹.

1. **Legislative Hearings** are held to hear testimony on bills that have been introduced and referred to the Committee or to gather information to draft legislation (recent ENR example on Senator Bingaman's Clean Energy Standard Act of 2012: www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/featured-items?ID=1cac9909-e86f-4486-89d5-a13a763ad6ee).
2. **Oversight Hearings** are convened for the Committee to review federal agencies or government programs (recent ENR example: Consolidating the Office of Surface Mining within the Bureau of Land Management: www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=78004e99-3afa-4b79-82c9-fd1a8b1c4ac2).
3. **Investigative Hearings** are opportunities for the Committee to explore a topic of interest that may not be directly related to legislation. These hearings can also be held if there is evidence

of criminal activity (recent ENR example: Gasoline prices: www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=25dc6776-a6f1-4f58-b2b4-ee418fc0eccd4).

4. **Confirmation Hearings** are held to consider presidential appointees (recent ENR example: Arunava Majumdar as Under Secretary of Energy: www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=d19d409a-3d26-41f5-bec6-a2c47da281e9).
5. **Field Hearings** are held outside of Washington, D.C., and can be legislative, oversight, or investigative in nature (recent ENR example: U.S. Navy Energy and Water Policies: www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=aa329d7d-6a30-4d27-8af8-a3e943e4e00a).

Because of the broad range of subjects I cover within the Committee, I have already had the opportunity to contribute to two field hearings during my fellowship. When I first learned about field hearings, I envisioned Senators, staff, and witnesses on a field trip together (all wearing hard hats, of course) to learn more about a site or subject. In reality, a field hearing looks and feels just like every other hearing conducted by the Senate with respect to formality and decorum.

The first field hearing I worked on (and mentioned in my previous report [*GSA Today*, v. 22, no. 3, p. 26]) was held in Charleston, West Virginia, to examine Marcellus Shale Gas development and production. The second was convened by the Subcommittee on Water and Power on 12 March in Norfolk, Virginia, aboard the *USS Kearsarge* (the first hearing aboard a ship in more than 50 years) to hear testimony about the U.S. Navy's energy and water policies. This hearing will stand out as a highlight of my fellowship year with the Committee.

The morning of the hearing, the participants, including Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Senator Mark Warner (D-VA), and former Virginia Senator John Warner (Warner also served as the Secretary of the Navy during the Nixon administration), convened at the Senate office buildings to be transported to Andrews Air Force Base, where we caught a military air flight to Norfolk. I sat across the aisle from former Senator Warner and was treated to his recollections of working for President Nixon and attending law school at the University of Virginia with Robert F. Kennedy. Since retiring from the Senate, Warner has been a tireless advocate for achieving national security and energy independence through implementing energy efficiency policies and adopting clean energy technologies within the Department of Defense (DOD).

Once we arrived, we were briefed by representatives of the Navy and Marine Corps, who demonstrated the clean energy technologies adopted in Iraq and Afghanistan that have not only saved taxpayer dollars but have also saved lives. What struck me

¹Koempel, M.L., and Schneider, J., 2007, Congressional Deskbook: The Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Congress (fifth edition).

most during these conversations was that the people we were speaking with had actually been implementing the new clean energy technologies in the theater of war. They sincerely believed that these technologies were making a difference in their ability to defend our country. They weren't primarily adopting them because they were "green" or helped combat climate change. They adopted them because these technologies require less resupply of fuel and water in remote locations; they are quiet and less detectable; they work; and they save lives. It was a pretty powerful endorsement from a group of people who admitted they were less than enthusiastic about making the change in the first place.

The hearing highlighted the Department of the Navy's (DON) clean energy goals to help it attain both energy security and energy independence, and this included the following:

1. **Energy Efficient Acquisition:** DON will make energy efficiency and overall energy footprint a fundamental factor in acquisitions and contract awards;
2. **Sail the "Great Green Fleet":** The "Great Green Fleet" is a carrier strike group of nuclear ships and hybrid electric ships and aircraft that run on biofuel. DON's objective is to demonstrate the fleet in local operations by 2012 and sail it by 2016;
3. **Reduce Non-Tactical Petroleum Use:** DON will reduce petroleum use in the commercial fleet by 50% by 2015 by using hybrid, electric, and flex-fuel vehicles;
4. **Increase Alternative Energy Ashore:** By 2020, alternative fuel sources will provide at least 50% of DON's shore-based energy requirements, and 50% of their installations will be net-zero;
5. **Increase Alternative Energy Use DON-Wide:** 50% of DON's total energy consumption will be derived from alternative sources.

The hearing included three panels of witnesses. Panel One began with the Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus. Panel Two featured former Virginia Senator John Warner. Panel Three included a mix of Navy staff who oversee energy issues: Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy Thomas Hicks (energy); Vice Admiral Philip Cullom, Director, U.S. Navy Task Force Energy; Major General James Kessler, Commander, Marine Corps Installations Command; Rear Admiral Townsend Alexander, Commander, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic; and Col. Robert Charette, Director, U.S. Marine Corps Expeditionary Energy Office. An audio recording of the hearing and the testimony of the witnesses is available at the ENR website (www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=aa329d7d-6a30-4d27-8af8-a3e943e4e00a). Below is some background information that highlights the critical role the Department of Defense (DOD), and specifically the Department of the Navy, is playing in advancing a clean energy agenda.

In 2011, the United States required ~7 billion barrels of petroleum, equal to 21% of total world petroleum consumption, to meet its energy needs. On average, the federal government accounts for 2% of the total annual U.S. consumption. By way of example, in Fiscal Year 2008, 93% of this petroleum was used by DOD. DON accounted for ~34% of total DOD petroleum use. DON's overall petroleum use can be broken down into maritime (38%), aviation (40%), expeditionary (16%), and shore (6%) mission domains (see references at the end of this article).

DON has been a leader in developing new tools to procure alternative fuels. They have chosen to pursue these alternatives to improve their operational effectiveness by reducing their potential risk by depending upon just one source of fuel. DON further concludes that by increasing their use of alternative fuels, they will bear less risk due to price volatility and security of supply. For example, they argue that it costs them US\$31 million in extra fuel costs for every dollar increase in the cost of a barrel of oil. By investing in energy innovation and clean energy, DON attests that they can help DOD respond to these energy challenges while simultaneously advancing the President's agenda to achieve energy security and independence by reducing the nation's dependence on fossil fuels.

Many Senators and Representatives applaud the Navy's efforts, but there are detractors as well. Some question how the Navy estimates the future price, price volatility, and future availability of both oil and alternative fuels. It may be difficult to critique either perspective until an evaluation can be made of the benefits of alternative fuels (e.g., potential decreased price volatility, diversified suppliers, etc.) versus the costs (e.g., R&D investment, uncertain future price of biofuels, etc.). Others question whether it is DOD's place to make these investments at all. To these detractors, I would ask if they also object to the DOD's role in developing the Internet, GPS, semiconductor computer chips, and flat-screen TVs. Regardless of your position on these issues, from my perspective, the DOD continues to be at the forefront of innovation in this country and, in this case, I feel pretty good about hanging up my field-work hat and trading it in for a Senate field hearing hat. I still would have liked a hard hat though.

For more information about the Navy's energy policies, check out DON's Energy Program for Security and Independence, http://greenfleet.dodlive.mil/files/2010/04/Naval_Energy_Strategic_Roadmap_100710.pdf, and the Pew Project on National Security, Energy, and Climate's report, "From Barracks to the Battlefield: Clean Energy Innovation and America's Armed Forces," www.pewenvironment.org/uploadedFiles/PEG/Publications/Report/DoD-Report_FINAL.pdf.

Editor's note: Since Kelly submitted this article, both the Senate and House Armed Services Committee voted to limit the DOD's biofuels purchasing power, which could have important implications for continued investment by the DOD.

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