Federal Energy Policy — The Earth Science Dimension

David Applegate

American Geological Institute, 4220 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22302-1502

After an unsuccessful attempt last year to pass comprehensive energy legislation, Congress is again working to pass the framework of a new national energy policy. This legislation would impact the earth sciences directly by authorizing inventories of energy resources on federal lands, energy-related research programs and a geoscience data preservation initiative. It also would have indirect impacts through tax credits for geological and geophysical expenses associated with petroleum exploration and incentives for geothermal energy development. Whether the current legislative efforts succeed will largely depend on the ability of the Bush Administration to reach common ground with a wide array of interests in both houses of Congress.

Although the comprehensive energy bill lays out a strong surge in support for geoscience-related research topics in both fossil and renewable energy sources, that support has not been forthcoming in actual federal spending. Oil and gas research programs, in particular, have been targeted for significant reductions by the administration. The geoscience community faces a significant challenge in convincing policymakers of the value of such research and the contributions that geoscientists make to the nation’s energy security. Having a clear sense of the political landscape is crucial to meeting this challenge.