Written Testimony Submitted by
Wilson Bonner and Linda Rowan, Government Affairs Staff
American Geological Institute
to the United States Senate
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development Appropriations
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To the Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide the American Geological Institute's perspective on fiscal year (FY) 2012 appropriations for geoscience programs within the Subcommittee's jurisdiction. The President's budget request for the Department of Energy (DOE) research programs provides important and modest investments in research and development (R&D) that will help support economic growth, job creation and energy independence, diversification and sustainable management. AGI strongly supports the wise and increased investments in the Office of Science [$5.4 billion] and Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy [$3.2 billion] (particularly the increase for geothermal R&D within EERE). AGI strongly supports investments in geoscience education, training and workforce development through the Office of Science’s Workforce Development for Teachers and Scientists [$35 million].

AGI is concerned about the termination of limited investments in oil and natural gas R&D within the Office of Fossil Energy. Oil and natural gas supply 62% of our nation’s energy and will continue to play a major role in the future. These investments will drive innovation to support and improve safe and effective domestic development of clean fossil fuels. The bulk of DOE’s oil and gas R&D investments go to institutions of higher education for training and research. The U.S. has a substantial workforce and significant investments in oil and natural gas research, development, exploration and production. Steady, but modest federal investments in fossil energy R&D with a longer term strategic plan would benefit the academic, private and public sectors.

The Office of Fossil Energy suffers from an unbalanced portfolio that focuses primarily on coal, faces uncertainty about direction and investments, and receives inconsistent funding. We ask for the Subcommittee’s support for oil and gas, unconventional natural gas, geothermal, hydropower, methane hydrates and carbon sequestration R&D so the nation can develop a diverse portfolio of energy resources while enhancing carbon mitigation strategies to secure clean, affordable and secure energy supplies for now and the future.

AGI is a nonprofit federation of 49 geoscientific and professional associations that represents more than 120,000 geologists, geophysicists, and other earth scientists. The institute serves as a voice for shared interests in our profession, plays a major role in strengthening geoscience education, and strives to increase public awareness of the vital role that the geosciences play in society's use of resources and interaction with the environment.
DOE Office of Science

The DOE Office of Science is the single largest supporter of basic research in the physical sciences in the United States, providing more than 40 percent of total funding for this vital area of national importance. The Office of Science manages fundamental research programs in basic energy sciences, biological and environmental sciences, and computational science and, under the budget request, would grow by about 9 percent from about $4.9 billion in 2010 to $5.4 billion in FY 2012. AGI asks that you support this much needed increase.

The President’s request would provide $35 million for Workforce Development for Teachers and Scientists, a program aimed at ensuring that DOE and the nation have a sustained pipeline of highly skilled and diverse science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workers. AGI strongly supports investments in geoscience education, training and workforce development within DOE and other federal agencies.

DOE Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy

Within Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, the President’s FY 2012 budget request would increase investments for R&D for many renewable energy resources. AGI applauds the $102 million requested for geothermal R&D and greatly appreciates previous support from Congress for this key alternative energy resource. The geothermal research program within the Renewable Energy account, which funds Earth science research in materials, geofluids, geochemistry, geophysics, rock properties, reservoir modeling, and seismic mapping, will provide the nation with the best research to build a successful and competitive geothermal industry. AGI also supports an Energy Innovation Hub focused on critical materials and hope this hub will consider ways to improve exploration, extraction and processing of necessary raw materials as well as replacement materials.

DOE Fossil Energy Research and Development

AGI urges you to look critically at the Fossil Energy Research and Development (R&D) portfolio as you prepare to craft the FY 2012 Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill. Many members of Congress have strongly emphasized the need for a responsible, diversified and comprehensive energy policy for the nation. The growing global competition for fossil fuels has led to a repeated and concerted request by Congress to ensure the nation’s energy security. The President’s proposal, which provides no funding for oil and gas R&D, is short sighted and inconsistent with congressional and public concerns. No funding for oil and gas R&D will hinder our ability to achieve energy stability and security.

The research dollars invested in oil and gas R&D go primarily to universities, state geological surveys and research consortia to address critical issues like enhanced recovery from known fields and unconventional sources that are the future of our natural gas supply. This money does not go into corporate coffers, but it helps American
businesses remain competitive by giving them a technological edge over foreign companies. All major advances in oil and gas production can be tied to research and technology. AGI strongly encourages the subcommittee to ensure a balanced and diversified energy research portfolio that does not ignore the nation’s primary sources of energy for the near future, fossil fuels.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to the subcommittee. If you would like any additional information for the record, please contact me at 703-379-2480, ext. 228 voice, 703-379-7563 fax, rowan@agiweb.org, or 4220 King Street, Alexandria VA 22302-1502.