



What the right hand giveth

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on February 21, 2006 - 12:06am

Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

Tags: [biofuel](#), [energy plan](#), [funding](#), [hydrogen](#), [nrel](#) [[list all tags](#)]

Just a short note as I pause briefly to change suitcase contents in a more than usually intense travel period, I saw that President Bush is [now starting](#) to place [more emphasis](#) on his [Energy Program](#). Discussion under the fold.

What particularly caught my eye was this paragraph:

On Tuesday, Bush plans to visit the Energy Department's National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo., to talk about speeding the development of biofuels.

The lab, with a looming \$28 million budget shortfall, had announced it was cutting its staff by 32 people, including eight researchers. But in advance of Bush's visit, Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman over the weekend directed the transfer of \$5 million to the private contractor that runs the lab, so the jobs can be saved.

The department "has been informed that the NREL lab director will use these funds to immediately restore all of the jobs that were cut earlier this month due to budget shortfalls," the department said in a statement Monday.

"Our nation is on the threshold of new energy technology that I think will startle the American people," Bush said. "We're on the edge of some amazing breakthroughs -- breakthroughs all aimed at enhancing our national security and our economic security and the quality of life of the folks who live here in the United States."

While I applaud the investment of more money into research in energy, one of the things that I have learned from the way some of our programs are funded is that money such as this is usually taken from somewhere else. And given that there are some other ongoing programs in DoE that are working on issues related to helping to ease some of the transition problems as we head over the hill, one can only hope that it is not these that will bear the cost of this transfer of funds.

The overall budget cut at NREL was apparently [\\$28 million](#) with the main impact on programs in biofuels, hydrogen and basic research. While the restoration will provide support for the folk that were laid off (8 research staff, and 24 support staff) one suspects that the external contracts that had been terminated will remain so. The current cuts in staff were only the first wave of a planned [one hundred plus](#) cut that were anticipated over the next year. Apparently the news of the cuts came rather [later than normal](#), and after this years expenditures had started, so that the cuts may still need to be severe, since the make-up so far is only about 20% of the overall cut. I am not sure how to take the comment

Garman blamed the cuts in part on lawmakers steering research and development funds to colleges and universities in their districts.

I think I will bite my tongue on this one. There is a more recent version of the story on [Reuters](#) that identifies that the money went to the Midwest Research Institute, that runs NREL (and which means that less of the money will likely make it to the lab itself). And as to where the monies are coming from

The programs at NREL are critically important to realizing the President's vision to diversify and strengthen our nation's energy mix," Bodman said. The Energy Department took the money from other accounts. The DOE said it will try to restore those funds by using money from several projects mandated by Congress in 2001 and 2002 "that have failed to make progress." Bush's 2007 budget requests a 78 percent increase in solar energy research; a 65 percent boost in biomass research; and a 42 percent rise in hydrogen research, work that would be conducted at NREL.



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