

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources



Washington, D.C. – A bipartisan group of energy policy leaders in the U.S. Senate today sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office requesting an investigation of the cost and feasibility of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor and its effect on U.S. fusion programs.

Senators Ron Wyden, D-Ore., Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., the leaders of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, issued the request.

“At a time when federal budgets for research are likely to be constrained for the foreseeable future, concerns have been raised that funding for other U.S. fusion energy science programs and user facilities have, and may continue to be, cut to pay for increasing ITER costs,” the senators wrote.

The International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) is a fusion research demonstration reactor currently under construction in southern France, jointly financed and managed by the European Union, India, Japan, China, Russia, South Korea and the United States. The United States has committed to fund 9.1 percent of the project’s cost, as well as contribute hardware and personnel. That cost has ballooned in recent years, and is a threat to other research efforts in a constrained budget environment.

The members requested that GAO investigate:

- The current cost and schedule to complete ITER and whether those estimates can be met, given the technical challenges the project faces;
- Whether the U.S. can delay or adjust its contribution to ITER without impacting the project; and
- Strategies for reducing the cost to the U.S.

In the 2014 fiscal year, the administration requested \$225 million for ITER, more than double the FY 2012 funding level of \$105 million, and nearly half of the Department of Energy’s budget for fusion energy.

DOE recently pledged to cap U.S. funding of ITER at \$2.4 billion, more than double the estimated U.S. contribution to the project in 2008, the most recent DOE estimate provided to Congress. Although ITER was originally slated to be complete in 2017, the project now estimates it will be operational in late 2020.

The letter is below.

Permalink: <http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2013/5/senators-request-gao-investigation-of-costs-at-experimental-fusion-reactor>

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 [ITER Letter 05 3 13.pdf](#) (530.0 KBs)