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BOEHLERT PROMISES TO KILL FUSION PROJECT IF FUNDING AGREEMENT IS NOT REACHED

WASHINGTON, DC, November 9, 2005 – House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) made the following statement today during debate over the Energy and Water appropriations bill:

“Mr. Chairman:

“I rise in support of this bill, and I want to thank Chairman Hobson for working on behalf of the civilian research and development programs of the Department of Energy. Needless to say, I wish the bill could have been even kinder to those programs, but I know that Chairman Hobson pressed on their behalf.

“I want, though, to bring attention to one concern I have about the conference report. The conferees dropped House language preventing an agreement on ITER, the international fusion project, from being finalized before March 1. This language, which I offered and the House approved by voice vote, was designed to prevent the U.S. from moving ahead with ITER until we had a consensus on how to finance the billion-dollar U.S. contribution.

“You’d think that would just be common sense in this period of fiscal austerity when we are talking about cutting programs that Americans rely on. But the House language has been replaced by weak report language calling for a study by the Government Accountability Office.

“I understand why, in the give and take of conference negotiations, my provision may have had to go away. But the issue is not going to go away.

“I want to make clear to everyone concerned that I will do everything in my power to kill the ITER project if there is not an agreement by March that the domestic fusion program has to be scaled back to pay for ITER.

“I am not going to allow the U.S. to enter into an international commitment that it cannot afford. I would rather kill the ITER project.

“The fusion community will have to be realistic. It cannot have all its current projects and ITER. And it will not.

“This year’s appropriation already makes clear why this is so. Just about every area of activity under the DOE Office of Science sees a cut, especially if earmarks are excluded, except Fusion Energy Sciences. Fusion science is important and may be a key to our energy future, but it cannot consume the entire budget of the Office of Science. And that is what will happen if the domestic program is held harmless while ITER is constructed.

“So I look forward to working with my colleagues on Appropriations and all my colleagues to make sure that the U.S. handles its international commitments responsibly. No one should misread what happened in this conference. The ITER program is in grave danger, and I guarantee you that it will not be completed with U.S. participation unless there is a more realistic plan to fund it.”

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