

## Life on the Hill The First Four Weeks

By MATTHEW ALLEN

The first four weeks have been a real learning experience. In the past month, I've had my first exposure to both hearings and markups.

A hearing is held to inform Members of Congress of anything within their committee's jurisdiction. Hearings are open to the public and serve as the main tool of oversight—typically involving testimony from federal agencies. They are also an enormous amount of work for Congressional committee staff. One of the first things required for a hearing is witnesses, typically picked by the minority staff with input from the minority. Once the witnesses and the date of the hearing are finalized, the staff researches the hearing topic and produces the hearing memo. My subcommittee staff director, Dr. Diane Berry, has a standing promise to buy lunch for anyone that can produce a hearing memo that's under five pages—I've never made it. To improve my writing skills, I've been reading up on improving—my last memo included no equations or extraneous math.

Background information must be extensively researched because the onus is on the staff to be prepared for any question that might arise during the hearing. It is also the role of the staff to provide questions to members for them to ask the witnesses. It's been a learning experience to observe that rigorously written hearing memos and questions the staff has spent large amounts of time drafting,

revising, and debating, are often gleefully ignored by the Members. At the end of every hearing, we submit *Questions for the Record*. These are questions Members ask the witnesses to look into and get back to the committee.

This month I also went through my first "markup." A markup is a public event where the majority and minority parties come together and debate and amend a bill—first at the subcommittee level and then at the full committee level. The Rail Bill (actually begun last Congress) was marked up on March 8<sup>th</sup> at the full committee level. As part of the markup, we work on amendments to the bill introduced by the majority. Amendments are drafted at the committee level and then circulated to committee members. Each subcommittee drafts amendments in their jurisdiction, typically to be supported by their ranking subcommittee member. My subcommittee worked on four amendments, which were then supported by Mr. McCaul. All four amendments were passed unanimously, with bipartisan support.

After an amendment is passed at the markup, we must submit *report language* (as I understand it) is essentially the meaning of a law or what the framers had in mind when the law was drafted. It is generally only seen by lawyers who refer back to the report language of this or that law during litigation.

In addition to preparing for hearings and markups, briefings are a daily occurrence. Briefings are split into two large categories: solicited and unsolicited. Solicited briefings are generally held because the staff needs more infor-



### POINTS OF INTEREST

- My next report will discuss the various technology related issues the Lab should be aware of in the Rail Bill and the FY08 Authorization Bill.
- Looking ahead: There will be a hearing on April 18 for BioShield, and April 19 for Cyber-security. If you're in DC, it may be worth stopping by.

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## Scientist Begins New Job At Congress

This February, Matthew Allen, a nuclear engineer by training and staff physicist at Sandia National Laboratories, arrived in Washington D.C. to begin a one year assignment as an ASME Congressional Fellow at the House of Representatives, Homeland Security (HS) Committee. The HS Committee is chaired by the Honorable Ben Ray Lujan, a democrat from Mississippi.<sup>1</sup> The Honorable Pete King, a Republican from New York, leads the minority staff.<sup>2</sup>



Chairman  
B. Thompson  
(D-MS)  
Ranking Mem.  
Pete King  
(R-NY)

Dr. Allen will be one of 19 staffers on the minority side—the majority is allocated 38 staffers.

March has been a busy month for the HS Committee. They recently passed H.R. 844, the "Promoting Anti-terrorism Cooperation through Technology and Science (PACTS) Act," and H.R. 1401, the Rail Bill – a bill intended to improve the security of rail-based transportation.

Most recently the staff has been very busy drafting the language for the FY08 Department of Homeland Security Authorization Bill. The Authorization bill, which typically authorizes hundreds of billions of dollars for DHS, is passed every year by the House but rarely by the

## ETC SUBCOMMITTEE HOLDS TWO HEARINGS WITH DNDO

In the month of March the ETC Subcommittee held two hearings that directly related to

the oversight of the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, (DNDO). Mr. Vayl Oxford, Director of DNDO, was the primary witness in both hearings.

The first hearing (held on March 14) examined studies from the Government Accountability Office (GAO). The GAO issued a report highlighting concerns with the cost-benefit analysis DNDO conducted to justify the acquisition of next generation radiation portal monitors (RPMs). Chief among these concerns was the price DNDO listed for current generation RPMs and the price of next generation Advanced Spectroscopic Portals. The second hearing (held on March 21) focused on DNDO's radiation portal monitor deployment strategy.

DNDO's plan to go forward with the deployment of hundreds of new Advanced Spectroscopic Portals (ASPs) figured prominently at both hearings. The final (potentially \$1 Billion) contract for procurement of ASP systems has not been granted. Tests currently underway at the Nevada Test Site are meant to compare current technology with the new systems and demonstrate the capability of three commercial companies to meet the required goals of detection and identification of radioactive materials.



Vayl Oxford  
Director DNDO



SubCom. Chair  
James Langevin  
(D-R)

The ETC Subcommittee is the technical arm of the HS Committee and has jurisdiction over chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats; agriculture; cyber-security; other emerging threats; the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO); the Homeland Security Applied Research Programs Agency (HSARPA); and cross-cutting science and technology initiatives at the Department of Homeland Security.

<sup>1</sup>Majority Webpage  
<sup>2</sup>Minority Webpage