



## 7. NUCLEAR: Japan crisis highlights danger lurking in int'l agreements, panel says *(Greenwire, 03/17/2011)*

**Hannah Northey, E&E reporter**

Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee agreed today that the Japanese nuclear crisis demands that Congress have more authority to oversee how international nuclear cooperation agreements are implemented.

What they did not agree on is how to make it palatable for President Obama and other members of Congress.

Foreign Affairs Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) said she plans to introduce legislation to increase congressional oversight of nuclear cooperation agreements and prevent another nuclear crisis like the one unraveling in Japan. Congress has little oversight of such agreements because they automatically go into effect unless the opposition can secure veto-proof majorities in the Senate and House.

Ros-Lehtinen said her bill will require that cooperation agreements get an affirmative vote from Congress before going into effect and strengthen nonproliferation agreements within those contracts in the future.

"Congress never intended for our long-term national security interests to be made subordinate to short-term political concerns," she said.

But Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.) said the legislation won't advance and will simply be "irrelevant" unless the committee attaches it to an appropriations bill. If lawmakers cannot accomplish that, Sherman said, "it's not going to happen."

The lawmakers want to add conditions to the international agreements for nuclear commerce to ensure there are controls on how nuclear material is used.

"The concern is that we haven't put enough stringent nonproliferation controls in those agreements," said Gene Aloise, the Government Accountability Office's director of natural resources and environment.

But if countries do not like the standards the United States floats, they can enter into agreements elsewhere, Aloise said, adding "we're not the only game in town."

GAO issued a 2009 report recommending the State Department change the International Atomic Energy Agency's policy for the agreements that deal with international nuclear commerce so that only countries in good standing with the agency get nuclear technical assistance, Aloise said.

Committee members agreed that the events unfolding at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi plant in the wake of a deadly earthquake and tsunami show that a highly technological and developed country can experience nuclear crises.

And although the tragedy will prompt some countries to pause and review the safety of their nuclear plants, it will not deter countries, especially those in the Middle East, from pursuing nuclear material for destructive means, Ros-Lehtinen said.

"Rogue nations attempting to build a nuclear weapons program need nuclear energy programs to use as cover, and we can be certain that the crisis in Japan will not persuade the Iranian regime to abandon its nuclear weapons program, nor should we expect North Korea to dismantle its recently revealed uranium enrichment program due to concerns that an accident could devastate a nearby population," she said.

---

Advertisement



imateWire

ENVIRONMENT  
& ENERGY DAILY

Greenwire



Land Letter

E&ENEWS PM



*Premier Information Source for Professionals Who Track Environmental and Energy Policy.*

96-2011 E&E Publishing, LLC [Privacy Policy](#) [Site Map](#)