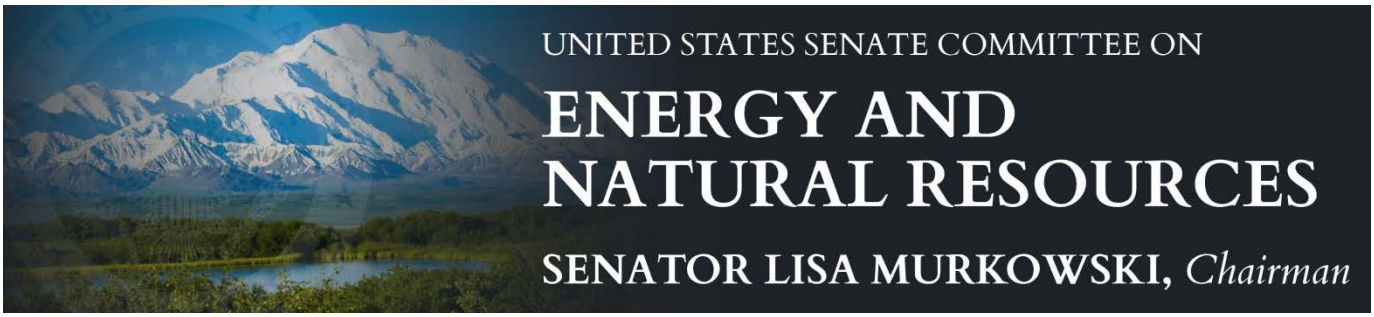

Methane Hydrate R&D Amendments Act

S. 1215 reauthorizes methane hydrates research and updates the program following recommendations from the Department of Energy's Methane Hydrate Advisory Committee.

Background

The methane hydrate research program has been without a valid authorization since 2010. Since Congress passed the first Methane Hydrate Research Act in 2000, the United States has devoted $152 million to the study of extracting natural gas from methane hydrates. The United States has 85 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of known methane hydrate reserves onshore Alaska, and 13,000 Tcf offshore in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean. The Secretary of Energy's Methane Hydrate Advisory Committee has recommended that the nation speed up its research into developing ways to tap this vast energy resource and prevent putting the United States' leadership position in methane hydrates research at risk.

Key Provisions

- Authorizes a production test on land in the Arctic within four years using lands that the State of Alaska has temporarily set aside for a long-term methane hydrate production test.
- Seeks characterization of hydrate concentrations at sea within four years to obtain better estimates of the amount of hydrates in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic by utilizing drilling to confirm resources.
- Authorizes a production test at sea within 10 years, likely in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico, to prove that deep hydrates are technologically recoverable and to identify the optimal production technology.
- Continues all of the nation's current methane hydrate scientific, laboratory and university partnerships to focus on technological developments, experimental analysis, analysis of field data, and further research into the climatic effects of hydrates and how to prevent any subsidence when methane molecules are unlocked below the seabed.