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Witnesses Agree on Swift Action To Reform Federal Helium Program, Save Tens of Thousands of Jobs

WASHINGTON D.C. – The House Natural Resources Committee today held a Full Committee [hearing](#) entitled, *The Past, Present and Future of the Federal Helium Program*, which focused on [H.R. 527](#), the “Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act,” [bipartisan legislation](#) that applies free-market principals to prevent a global helium shortage and provide American taxpayers with a fair return for the resources.

“Helium plays a large role in our daily lives and the 21st century economy. Life-saving MRI machines, high-tech manufacturing and national defense operations are all dependent on helium. Unless Congress takes swift action, America will float off a helium cliff – which will adversely affect American jobs and our economy. Stopping this disaster, while simultaneously implementing reforms, is the goal of today’s hearing,” [said Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings](#). “Updates to the program must be made to more accurately reflect today’s uses and demands for helium. H.R. 527 will implement a new operating system over the next decade that includes semiannual helium auctions. These auctions will inject much needed competition into the program and ensure that taxpayers are getting a fairer return.”

The Committee heard testimony from government experts on the Federal Helium Reserve and private sector job creators who rely on helium for the manufacturing of semiconductors and high-tech glass, the operation of MRI machines, and the sale and distribution of party balloons.

[Kimberly Elmore](#), Assistant Inspector General for Audits, Inspections and Evaluations at the Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General, confirmed that taxpayers aren’t really getting the best return for their resources and that federal helium is being sold below market value, “BLM has a current inventory of helium valued at approximately \$1 billion,” and that, “under current market conditions, BLM’s remaining helium inventory is worth considerably more than its current \$1 billion valuation.” Elmore insisted, “Without changes to the program, there is no assurance that BLM’s non-governmental helium sales will ever be made at market value.”

[Rodney Morgan](#), Vice President of Procurement at Micron Technology, a member of the Semiconductor Industry Association, reminded the Committee that, *“semiconductors are the basic building block of all modern electronics, and every year approximately 250,000 Americans work together to produce millions of computer chips that make smart phones, GPS, and MRI’s possible.”* Morgan was specific about the value of Helium in the semiconductor industry, *“Helium is just one of a number of gasses used to make our memory chips, but it’s absolutely vital. To put it simply, without helium, we cannot operate.”*

[Gary Page](#), President of Helium and Balloons Across America, represented small businesses that rely on a helium supply certainty. Page said the current tight helium market has left hundreds of his best customers, *“without any helium, or...a ration that will not allow them to meet the demands of the day.”* Page complained that, *“the control of our nation’s helium is bottlenecked by three refiners, [which] allows those refineries to have full control over supplies and ultimately drive pricing.”* Mr. Page cited the International Balloon Association when he expressed concern about a global helium shortage where, *“hundreds of thousands of jobs are impacted by helium supply issues.”*

[Brad Boersen](#), Director of Business Strategy for Corning’s Optical Fiber and Cable business testified about the importance of helium in optical fiber manufacturing, which starts by creating a glass rod or “perform.” Boersen explain that, *“Helium is the only gas that prevents bubbles from forming in the preform manufacturing step, which would render the fiber unusable.”* Boersen went on to say that if provisions of H.R. 527, *“had been in place last spring, Corning would not have incurred significant increased costs.”*

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