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Committee Approves Bipartisan Bill to Prevent Global Helium Shortage of Helium, Protect American Jobs

WASHINGTON D.C. – Today, the House Natural Resources Committee passed [H.R. 527](#), the “Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act”, with a bipartisan amendment, by a voice vote. The [bipartisan legislation](#), introduced by Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04) and Ranking Member Ed Markey (MA-05), applies free-market principles to future sales from the Federal Helium Reserve, which is scheduled to close this year, in order to prevent a global helium shortage and provide American taxpayers with a fair return for this resource.

Previously, 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.

“The operation of the federal helium reserve is vital to American manufacturing, job creation, and strong economic growth. Yet reforms must be made to sell off the helium in a more responsible manner,” said Chairman Hastings. “This legislation is a perfect example of using free market principles and bipartisan cooperation to solve a serious problem and guarantee taxpayers a fair return on their resources. I look forward to working with members on both sides of the aisle to bring this legislation to the floor of the House and eventually sign it into law.”

Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act (as amended today):

- Prevents global helium shortages and promote market-based reforms by implementing a three-phase system for operating the Federal Helium Reserve until the Reserve is emptied of helium.
 - [Phase A](#) - The Federal Helium Reserve will be restarted operating in a similar fashion to current law until one year after the date of enactment.
 - [Phase B](#) - Semi-annual helium auctions will be established to promote competition and ensure a better return for taxpayers.

- 60% of the crude helium will be made available to refiners and those with signed tolling agreements.
 - 20% of the crude helium will be available to any bidder (including refiners) that is pre-approved by the Secretary of the Interior and has a proven interest in helium. Ensures that those who purchase helium will have access to the existing pipeline infrastructure.
 - As the helium sold to other bidders (as outlined in the point above) is refined, then an additional amount of the crude helium, up to the full remaining 20%, will be made available by auction to refiners and those with existing tolling agreements.
 - Allows the Secretary to conduct a “forward auction” of up to 10% of the future years’ production to help establish long term price guidance and allow interested parties to secure their helium supply early.
 - The Secretary of the Interior will set a minimum sale price for auctions based on a confidential survey of current market crude helium prices and a review of auction prices. The Secretary has the authority to increase or decrease the minimum price based on market conditions. There are limits on the amount any one bidder can purchase to avoid disruption of supply.
 - Funds from the auctions will go to the Helium Production Fund, used to operate and maintain the Reserve. Excess revenue will be directed to the general Treasury.
- Phase C – Starting when there is 3 billion cubic feet of helium remaining in the Reserve, commercial sales of helium will end and the remaining helium will only be available for federal national security and federal scientific and research needs.
- Increases transparency and prevent unexpected supply disruptions by requiring the Bureau of Land Management to make more information available online regarding planned maintenance closures of the Reserve, the duration of the closure and efforts to minimize any impacts to the supply chain.
 - Requires the federal government to work with state geological surveys to complete a national helium gas assessment.
 - Establishes coordinated research on helium-3 isotope that could be used for national defense and clean energy development.

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