

There are a lot of things to disagree about in terms of energy policy. One thing that ought to be common ground, as discussed in a Washington Post column, is increased research in energy R&D. As this chart shows, federal support for energy R&D is smaller than it was under Ronald Reagan:



The economic argument for supporting R&D is simple. Private firms don't have enough of an incentive to engage in basic research because intellectual property law doesn't allow them to capture the full benefits of the resource. For that reason, government support for the research is necessary. Moreover, really new ideas have a high risk factor that may make them unattractive to private investors (a problem addressed by the ARPA-E program.)

For this reason, it's good news that the President's proposed budget includes substantial increases for DOE energy research in general and for ARPA-E in particular. Specifically, as [Scientific American](#) reports, the budget includes "\$300 million for an innovative energy research program, and a \$226 million increase in funding for the Office of Science for research and development of 'breakthrough' technologies for a total of \$5.1 billion." Even conservatives who are allergic to government regulation ought to be in favor of technological progress.