

WASHINGTON UPDATE – July 2, 2009

On June 26, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act, known colloquially as the Waxman-Markey climate change bill, by a close margin of 219 - 212. The measure benefited from a major push by Democratic Congressional leadership, the White House, and President Obama himself. You can find out how your representative voted on the measure and an analysis of the roll call vote, by political party and Congressional district, here: <http://politics.nytimes.com/congress/votes/111/house/1/477>

The bill is both comprehensive energy legislation in support of renewable energy & energy efficiency and an economy-wide cap & regulatory system for greenhouse gas emissions. At its core, the bill would place a national cap on greenhouse gas emissions, decreasing gradually from present levels to 80 percent under 2005 levels by 2050. It would manage the cap through a market-based mechanism called cap-and-trade, which is modeled in part on the sulfur dioxide cap-and-trade mechanism that the EPA successfully implemented through the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and which practically eliminated the problem of acid rain in the United States.

In addition, an "Adapting to Climate Change" title of the bill features a number of important new programs and authorizations that would involve the atmospheric science and research community. Several sections could vastly improve how the federal government coordinates, funds, and otherwise supports climate research and climate services. Notably, two sections in the title, which both were previously stand-alone bills in the House, would (1) re-authorize and strengthen the U.S. Global Change Research Program, and (2) create a National Climate Service to deliver timely and authoritative information on climate change impacts to decision makers and end users at the regional, state, and community levels. If experience in the House is any indication, these components of the bill should be retained on the Senate side without major controversy or dissent.

Chances for Senate passage of the full measure, however, are still up in the air. While House passage marks a major hurdle for the legislation, the bill faces an even higher bar for passage in the Senate, where 60 percent of votes, or 60 out of 100 Senators, are required for passage. As of the latest informal count, 45 senators are likely to vote yes, 22 are likely to vote no, and 23 are still unknowns -- although this is an early count because the Senate legislation has not been fully drafted yet. With stakes high and a major international climate change conference planned in Copenhagen this December, expect national leaders and other advocates to engage in a vigorous debate and personally lobby the senators who have yet to make up their minds. And as the bill moves forward, we are likely to call on some of you to contact your senators.

The schedule for consideration in the Senate is already moving fast, and several committees are involved in the drafting, including the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Technology will have jurisdiction over the part of the bill dealing with the creation of a National Climate Service and reauthorization of the U.S. Global Change Research Program. The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, which has primary jurisdiction over the bill, will be holding four hearings during July and is expected to consider it in committee by the first week of August. Majority Leader Harry Reid has promised a vote on the bill in the full Senate in September.

As always, we will keep you posted on any further major developments in Washington on this and other climate change legislation.