



05-21-09

House committee OKs Waxman/Markey energy & climate bill

By Jon H. Harsch

© Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc.

After a four-day marathon 37 hours of markup discussion and votes, House Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Henry Waxman (D-CA) got his wish: the committee voted 33 to 25 to send the Waxman/Markey energy and climate change bill HR 2454 on to the House Agriculture Committee and other House committees for further consideration before it goes to the full House.

Waxman concluded the proceedings at 8:30 Thursday evening by saying “We’re taking a decisive and historic action to promote America’s energy security, to create millions of clean energy jobs that will drive our economic recovery and long term growth. When this bill is enacted into law, we’ll break our dependence on foreign oil, make our nation the world leader in clean energy jobs and technology, and cut global warming pollution.” He said the legislation has “gained substantial support from industry, labor and environmental groups throughout the country,” listing Duke Energy, the Edison Electric Institute, the Environmental Defense Fund, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Sierra Club, General Electric, Alcoa, DuPont, the Mine Workers, the Auto Workers, the Steel Workers, Shell, Conoco, and the World Wildlife Fund as supporters. He said such groups represent “a growing consensus on the need to act and act responsibly, and I believe that’s what we have done.”

Waxman added that “this is not the end of our work.” He reiterated the commitments he made during markup to hold further hearings on tricky areas such as the system of allocating carbon credits and perhaps widening the definition of woody biomass to make more eligible as feedstock for biorefineries.

Ranking Member Joe Barton (D-TX) followed with a gracious summation, telling Waxman that “I don’t agree with the work product but I do agree and am very much impressed with your ability in your first major test as chairman to keep the committee functioning in a collegial way.” He explained that he and others “do have serious and legitimate concerns about the redirection of our energy policy.” He said the U.S. economy has been “based on a free-market allocation of resources in the energy sector and this bill does make fundamental changes in that basic philosophy.” He acknowledged

that the bill's supporters "have every right to think that those changes are necessary and for the sake of our nation, I hope to some degree that you are right."

In his own closing statement, the bill's co-sponsor, Subcommittee Chair Ed Markey (D-MA) predicted that the committee's vote "will be remembered decades from now." He explained that "With this plan, we will shape a new energy destiny for our country, where we innovate more and pollute less. Today we have chosen bold action to preserve good paying jobs here in America and preserve our planet. In just eight weeks, Chairman Waxman and I, working with our entire committee, have moved us farther down the path toward energy independence than our country had moved in the past eight years."

Earlier, Markey summed up what divided the two sides in the four-day markup. Responding to the latest in a series of Republican amendments which would have suspended the legislation if it triggered negative effects such as job losses or electricity price increases, Markey said "We've had this discussion over and over again. It has manifested itself in different ways. But it all comes down to the same decision which we have to make, and that is whether or not we believe that the legislation which we are considering is going to create a new generation of green jobs. Whether or not it is going to lead to developing the domestic capacity for us to begin to back out that 13 million barrels of oil a day which we consume from overseas. That's the choice."

The choice the committee made by majority vote was to support the cap-and-trade legislation – without the "off ramps" that Republicans repeatedly tried to add to the bill in various amendments.

Following Thursday's Energy & Commerce Committee vote, the Waxman/Markey bill, HR 2454, The American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES), now goes to the House Agriculture Committee and other House committees for their input before full House consideration, expected sometime this summer.

#30