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Close vote expected around 5 PM as House debates climate bill

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With both sides still fighting to recruit fence-sitters, the House floor debate on comprehensive climate and energy legislation Friday morning spotlighted a single point of agreement: that the American Clean Energy & Security Act marks a major turning point in American history. For most Republicans, passing the bill would impose a massive “energy tax” on U.S. businesses and consumers, devastating the U.S. economy. For many Democrats – not including some Democrats with conservative rural districts – the bill is urgently needed to begin reversing global warming which threatens to devastate the planet as a whole.

During the 9 AM opening round of debate, Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN) called the Waxman/Markey climate bill “the largest tax increase in American history, under the guise of climate change legislation.” He charged that there is “no debate that this legislation will cost millions of America jobs,” noting that the bill recognizes this fact because “the bill itself actually includes a fund that would provide resources for Americans who lose their jobs if cap and trade becomes law.”

Pence pointed out that the Democrats added 309 pages to the bill and limited debate on the bill to three hours, with an additional 30 minutes allowed for a Republican substitute – and did so at 3 AM Friday morning. Pence continued: “I would ask the Democrat majority and the Speaker respectfully, What’s the hurry? What are we hiding here that we can’t afford more time for the American people and their elected representatives to examine what’s in this bill? Is there more corporate welfare, more deals for special interests, were members that were on the fence placated with special provisions for industries in their districts?”

As the hurried and heated initial debate continued over the rule limiting debate on the bill itself to three hours, Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) characterized the bill as “a government regulation of the very air you breathe. . . a liberals’ dream.” Steve Scalise (R-LA) charged that “This is a massive energy tax on the backs of the American people all across this country. All estimates show millions of jobs will be lost by this cap and trade energy tax.”

In contrast, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA) called the bill “A landmark achievement. . . For the first time as a nation, we are moving toward energy independence, creating millions of new, clean jobs, and confronting the threat that global warming poses to the earth.” If the bill does not become law, he warned, “the world that we bequeath to our children will be diminished by continued reliance on Middle Eastern oil, by exporting billions of hard-earned American dollars to petro dictatorships and by a warming earth.”

Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL) urged “my colleagues who think that global warming is a hoax” to “face reality” and accept the “hundreds of peer-reviewed scientific studies that say global warming is real and that man’s actions contribute greatly to that increase in temperature.”

Following a 217 to 205 vote in favor of the rule limiting debate on the bill to three hours, the House turned to a series of votes on Interior Department appropriations – votes which give both Democrats and Republicans more time to try to convince wavering members to vote for or against the climate change legislation.

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