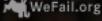


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House climate paper stresses 'economy-wide' approach

By Jim Snyder
Posted: 10/04/07 06:55 PM [ET]

Two key House Democrats said Wednesday that a climate bill they are writing would cap emissions of so-called greenhouse gases at 60 to 80 percent of present-day levels by 2050.

Environmental groups welcomed the document as another step toward a first-ever cap on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse-gas emissions, although some lobbyists said it is unlikely a bill can be passed in the remaining months of the session.



The 21-page "white paper," released by Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman John Dingell (D-Mich.) and Energy and Air Quality subcommittee Chairman Rick Boucher (D-Va.), lays out where greenhouse gases come from as much as it provides answers to how those emissions will be reduced.

But lobbyists in industry and among advocacy groups generally seemed impressed by the level of detail the document did include, as well as by its summary of the issues that need to be addressed in a greenhouse gas emissions reduction program.

The paper states unequivocally that such a program is necessary.

"The United States needs an economy-wide, mandatory greenhouse reduction program," the Dingell-Boucher paper states.

Dingell already has released a bill that would tax carbon dioxide emissions. But the paper he and Boucher put out yesterday instead embraces a cap-and-trade approach. Under this scenario, emitters would be able to trade government-issued allowances to help them meet federal emissions caps.

A lobbyist for the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), Jeremy Symons, said he was encouraged by the fact that Dingell and Boucher promise to press for economy-wide reductions that would fall on all emitting sectors of the economy.

"The scope needs to be economy-wide, and the transportation sector needs to be included," Symons said.

In a statement, the NWF called the Dingell-Boucher paper an "important contribution" to the climate debate, but called on the committee to pursue the upper limit of its own target range.

Environmental groups remain skeptical of Dingell, although the chairman has promised to deliver an aggressive climate-change bill. The powerful chairman is a well-known supporter of the auto industry, and has helped to block increases in fuel-efficiency standards that would limit carbon dioxide emissions and that are favored by environmental groups.

Dingell currently is working to relax new Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards in the Senate version of the energy bill in favor of a less aggressive target set by Reps. Baron Hill of Indiana, a Democrat, and Lee Terry of Nebraska, a Republican.

But the paper notes that the transportation sector accounted for 28 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2005, and said it too would be required to cut back.

Because of the difficulty of distributing allowances to car and truck owners, a cap-and-trade program would principally affect oil refiners and importers, the "upstream" components of the fuel cycle, the

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paper indicates.

Dingell and Boucher also acknowledged that carmakers will be pressed to design more fuel-efficient vehicles in their overall climate program, "through efficiency or other performance standards for vehicles," the paper states.

Lobbyists for the oil industry, however, remain concerned that their industry will be asked to do more to reduce emissions than automakers will be under a Dingell-crafted climate bill.

"It's hard for us to believe that we are not going to be asked to bear more of the brunt of this," one industry lobbyist said.

A cap-and-trade program would also include electric utilities, which contribute the most greenhouse gas emissions, 34 percent, of any industry. Manufacturers and other industries, which contribute 19 percent of emissions, would also fall under the parameters of the program, according to the paper.

Capping emissions at commercial or federal buildings or residential homes would be trickier under a cap-and-trade approach, and may require an alternative emissions-reducing program, the paper states.

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