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Climate Bill Clears Hurdle, but Others Remain

By [JOHN M. BRODER](#)

WASHINGTON — The House Energy and Commerce Committee, splitting largely along party lines, approved on Thursday the most ambitious energy and [global warming](#) legislation ever debated in Congress.

The bill's passage, on a 33-to-25 vote, served as a bookend to a week that began with [President Obama](#)'s announcing a deal with auto manufacturers to impose tough new mileage and emissions standards for all cars and trucks sold in the United States starting in 2012.

With progress on this legislation and his own executive actions, Mr. Obama is assembling the pieces of a credible American package to take to Copenhagen later this year as [United Nations](#) negotiators gather for talks on a new global warming treaty.

But the energy legislation passed on Thursday still faces a tortuous path through several more House committees before it can be brought up for a vote later this year. In the Senate, leaders say they lack the votes to pass the bill as it is now written.

Representatives [Henry A. Waxman](#) of California and [Edward J. Markey](#) of Massachusetts, both Democrats, sponsored the bill. Mr. Waxman called it "decisive and historic."

"When this bill is enacted," Mr. Waxman said, "we'll break our dependence on foreign oil, make our nation a leader in clean-energy jobs and technology and cut global warming pollution."

The objections of the Republican opponents were summed up in the words of Representative Mike Rogers of Michigan, who said the bill would mean sharp increases in energy costs and the loss of millions of jobs.

"This is the biggest energy tax in the history of the United States," Mr. Rogers said.

Mr. Obama did not play a major public role in the committee's work, but intervened quietly on several occasions, calling nervous conservative Democrats to assure them that a vote for the bill would not hurt them politically. Two weeks ago, he gathered all of the panel's Democrats at the White House to urge them to set aside their differences to produce a bill that met his goals of

energy conservation and global warming abatement.

The measure approved by the House committee runs more than 930 pages. It establishes a cap-and-trade program to control climate-altering emissions; dictates an increase in the use of renewable energy sources; and sets new efficiency standards for buildings, lighting and industrial facilities. It calls for a 17 percent reduction in emissions of heat-trapping gases from 2005 levels by 2020 and 83 percent by 2050.

It was the object of one of the biggest lobbying campaigns of any piece of environmental legislation, with millions of dollars spent on both sides in the months leading up to Thursday's vote. Lawmakers heard from former Vice President [Al Gore](#), local utility companies, hunters and fishermen, national environmental groups, agricultural interests and the [coal](#), oil and natural gas industries.

Much more is to come as the bill, known as the American Clean Energy and Security Act, is taken up by the Ways and Means Committee and, possibly, House panels on agriculture, transportation and natural resources.

The measure has critics and supporters on the left and right. Many large manufacturers and the majority of the big utilities support it, for now, as the least-bad option for what is considered the inevitable imposition of controls on heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide.

The [National Association of Manufacturers](#) and the United States Chamber of Commerce opposed it, although some members of both groups broke with leadership to endorse the measure. These two big lobbies argued that it was a burdensome tax on business that would drive companies and jobs overseas while doing little to address climate change.

The major environmental advocacy groups are, for the most part, enthusiastic backers. "Clearly, it's an unprecedented step forward in the critical effort to create millions of clean-energy jobs, reduce our dependence on oil and protect our planet from global warming pollution," said Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters.

But some groups, like [Greenpeace](#), Friends of the Earth and [Public Citizen](#), expressed concern that the bill as drafted gave away too much to polluting industries and depended excessively on hypothetical reductions in emissions of heat-trapping gases from developing countries.

"Despite the best efforts of Chairman Waxman, the decision-making process was co-opted by oil and coal lobbyists determined to sustain our addiction to dirty fossil fuels," said a joint statement from the groups. "The resulting bill reflects the triumph of politics over science, and the triumph of industry influence over public interest."

When Mr. Waxman first unveiled his plan in late March, at least a dozen of the panel's 36 Democrats had qualms of it. These so-called Brown Dogs were mainly from states dependent on coal for power and manufacturing for jobs, and needed assurance that their constituents would be protected.

In weeks of closed-door negotiations with these Democrats, Mr. Waxman doled out billions of dollars worth of free pollution permits, known as allowances, to cushion any price shock caused by imposing a cap on emissions of heat-trapping gases.

In the end, 85 percent of all pollution allowances were given at no cost for various purposes, including compensating energy-intensive industries, state governments, oil refiners and low-income households, at least in the early years of the program. Mr. Obama's position during the presidential campaign was that all of the permits should be auctioned, not given away, but the White House did not object to Mr. Waxman's generous allocations.

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