

## Lawmakers' Climate Meetings May Ease Possible House-Senate Conference

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While formal negotiations between the House and Senate on climate change legislation may be months away, lawmakers from both bodies are already taking steps to streamline a potential upcoming conference committee in an effort to expedite the process and ensure final passage as soon as this year.

The efforts, including a recent briefing by Rep. Rick Boucher (D-VA) for senators on the House-drafted bill, underscore growing pressure on the Senate to gear up for climate change legislation.

In addition, an apparent agreement between House Energy & Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA) and Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN) to back a pending Senate measure on nuclear power sometime in the future appears to show lawmakers are starting to look ahead to a House-Senate conference on the climate and energy legislation.

As the House was preparing for floor debate, Boucher met June 23 with more than a dozen senators as part of an ongoing effort to make the lawmakers more familiar with the House legislation and more prepared for future debate on the issue. Boucher has already played a significant role in brokering deals to address the interest of coal-state lawmakers in the House, serving as a point man for concerns by moderate Democrats during energy committee mark up of the bill last month.

In a June 25 interview with *Carbon Control News*, Boucher said the meeting was held in response to an invitation from Senate Environment & Public Works Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-CA), with approximately 15 senators showing up from the "Tuesday group" Boxer has organized to discuss climate change issues. "I described the bill, what we did to make it economically sustainable, how we are constraining electricity rates and what we did for industries exposed to trade," Boucher said, adding that he took questions for about an hour. Boucher said he listed some areas where he thought lawmakers would be asked to make tweaks to the House plan, though he declined to elaborate on the specifics.

### **'Not Negotiation'**

A Senate source familiar with the meeting says there was discussion of provisions both considered and adopted, including proposals to trim back a 2020 emissions target, with the source describing the meeting as casual and "not a negotiation." One of the main thrusts of Boucher's message during the discussion was that the House has already addressed a lot of issues that may be troubling Senate lawmakers, the source says.

More broadly, the source adds that the speed of the House process on climate change up to this point is sending a message to Senate lawmakers that "you need to get a position on issues." Boxer recently has been talking up prospects for a markup in her committee by the week of

August 3, and has told reporters that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) has set a goal for all Senate committees to take action on their portions of a climate change measure by mid September.

On a separate front, Peterson on June 23 gave reporters an apparent early glimpse into possible House-Senate conference dynamics on nuclear-related issues during his explanation of a then-emerging deal between himself and Waxman on provisions of the bill affecting the agriculture sector.

Specifically, Peterson noted that, while the issue would not be addressed in the pending House climate bill measure at this point, “there is a deal” where Waxman has agreed to back language in pending Senate energy legislation that would allow rural electric cooperatives to use loan funds provided by the Rural Utility Services to invest in new nuclear power plants. “It is going to be in the Senate [energy] bill and Henry agreed to agree to it,” Peterson said. A call to Waxman’s committee on the matter was not returned.

Capitol Hill sources over the past several weeks have said that there has already been some coordination, whether through inspiration or direct communication, on issues like the climate bill’s treatment of the agriculture sector. Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), who floated a draft proposal to boost agriculture offsets during last year’s Senate climate debate, told *Carbon Control News* June 16 that she had both shared ideas with Peterson and communicated with Boxer on the issue.—*Doug Obey*