



2. **CLIMATE:** House global warming committee goes gentle into that good night (12/02/2010)

Jean Chemnick, E&E reporter

Four years ago, the new Democratic House majority introduced the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming to agitate for one of its top legislative priorities: action to curb the emissions linked to climate change.

Yesterday, the incoming Republican majority announced it would pull the plug on that committee, in part to make good on one of its own campaign talking points -- the need to rein in federal spending, including congressional salaries.

"We made it pretty clear we were going to get rid of waste and duplication in terms of how we run the Congress," House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio), the speaker-designate, told reporters last night. "The global warming committee doesn't need to be a separate committee. We believe that the science committee is more than capable of handling this issue, and in the process we will save several million dollars."

The committee's ranking Republican, Wisconsin Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, was the first to break the news yesterday, opening a hearing that the Democrats had scheduled titled "Not Going Away: America's Energy Security, Jobs and Climate Challenges," by announcing that the committee would, in fact, go away as soon as Republicans take control of the House in January.

Though he is a staunch opponent of a mandatory cap on industrial carbon dioxide emissions of the kind that passed the House last year, Sensenbrenner supported renewing the select committee for the 112th Congress. At the hearing, he said it had "provided a forum for bipartisan debate and an opportunity for House Republicans to share a different view on the pressing energy and environmental issues that we currently face."

The panel has no power to mark up legislation but instead served as a platform to support the Democratic energy and environmental agenda, including the passage of a cap-and-trade bill to curb industrial greenhouse gas emissions.

The House bill, co-sponsored by Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and the select committee's Chairman Ed Markey (D-Mass.), cleared the chamber last year and would have reduced emissions by more than 80 percent below current levels by 2050. It stalled in the Senate.

The panel under Markey held 75 hearings on subjects including climate, last summer's Deepwater Horizon oil spill and its cleanup, and the need for higher fuel economy standards for cars and trucks.

Markey closed the final hearing of his panel yesterday by saying that the related problems of climate change and overreliance on fossil fuels would continue, even after a Republican majority takes control of the House next month. Eventually, he said, it will lead to a shift away from high-carbon fuels and toward alternatives.

"I'm still optimistic," he said. "We know this is inevitable."

Still, Markey said he was disappointed in the Republican leadership's decision to kill the committee for the new Congress.

"I think that this committee provided a very important forum to debate some of the most important issues facing our country and the world," he said.

Waxman said he had expected the Republicans to end the committee.

"So many of them don't even accept the fact that there is a problem with global warming. They won't accept the science or the evidence," he said. "I think it is unfortunate but not unexpected."

The final hearing of the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming featured four guests invited by Democrats and one invited by Republicans.

Witnesses including retired Navy Vice Adm. Dennis McGinn and environmental attorney Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who urged immediate action to mitigate climate change. American Enterprise Institute fellow Kenneth Green told the panel that while climate change is occurring, it represents a "real but modest threat" and that the real ethical dilemma in his view is how to provide poor countries with adequate inexpensive energy sources to grow their economies.

Reporter Sarah Abruzzese contributed.

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