

U.S. climate bill gets a major boost

President Barack Obama's fight against global warming got a huge boost on Thursday when a key congressional panel embraced his plan to create a new, market-driven system for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, reports Reuters.

After a nearly week-long debate, the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee, with a mostly partisan vote of 33-25, embraced Obama's "cap and trade" climate change initiative -- one of the president's top legislative priorities this year.

The "cap-and-trade" system is the heart of the U.S. climate legislation. It would gradually reduce the amount of greenhouse gases from utilities, oil refineries, steelmakers and other companies by requiring them to have permits to spew their emissions.

The roughly 1,000-page bill aims to cut U.S. greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming by 17 percent below 2005 levels by the year 2020 and 83 percent by 2050.

The legislation also requires utilities to generate 15 percent of their electricity supplies by 2020 from renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar power.

Representative **Henry Waxman**, the committee's chairman, said the bill advanced because it had "substantial support from industry, labor and environmental groups from across the country."

Among the major U.S. companies that have endorsed a cap and trade program are Alcoa, DuPont, Caterpillar Inc and a coalition of electric power companies.

A step closer to clean economy

With the panel's vote, the measure moved closer to a vote in the full House, which could occur by August after other committees review and possibly refine the legislation.

Democratic supporters say they want enactment of a bill this year but the outlook in the Senate was unclear.

The White House is hoping that at least significant progress will aid efforts culminating in December in Copenhagen for a new international pact on cutting industrial emissions linked to climate change problems.

"President Obama has made it clear that he wants to go to Copenhagen as the leader and not the laggard, which we have been over the last eight years," said Representative **Edward Markey**, a Democrat who wrote the bill with Waxman.

"We are now one step closer to delivering on the promise of a new clean energy economy that will make America less dependent on foreign oil, crack down on polluters, and create millions of new jobs all across America," Obama said in a statement after the vote on the legislation.

Stakeholders' comments

Republicans argue such a plan would further slow an ailing U.S. economy, raise energy prices for consumers and speed the exodus of manufacturers using large amounts of energy to lower-cost countries such as China and India.

Some environmentalists complained that the Waxman-Markey bill had become too soft on carbon reductions and alternative energy requirements. At the same time many of the groups applauded what could be the toughest bill politically doable.

Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the bill would create "millions of good-paying American jobs" and was "an historic step to unleash clean energy and rein in global warming pollution."

Source: Reuters