

Energy Bill Adopted by House Requires Utilities to Use Renewable Power Sources

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 4 — The House passed a wide-ranging energy bill on Saturday that will require most utilities to produce 15 percent of their electricity from renewable sources like wind and solar power. President Bush has vowed to veto the bill because it does nothing to encourage increased domestic production of oil and gas.

“It’s a big, big deal,” said Representative Edward J. Markey, Democrat of Massachusetts and a longtime member of the energy committee. “There has been no legislation like this for a generation.”

The energy measure passed by a vote of 241-172, with 26 Republicans voting in favor and 9 Democrats opposed. Speaker Nancy Pelosi had made the bill one of her top legislative priorities for her first year as leader of the House Democrats.

The bill allots money for the development of alternative fuels and for increased efficiency of appliances and buildings. It is also meant to spur research on methods to capture the carbon dioxide emissions that scientists say are largely responsible for global warming.

The House also passed a bill to repeal roughly \$16 billion in tax breaks for the oil industry enacted in 2005. Some of the money would be used to pay for the research grants and renewable-fuel projects in the energy bill.

The utilities provision, or the so-called renewable electricity standard amendment, was among the most contested measures in the energy bill. Sponsored by Representative Tom Udall, Democrat of New Mexico, and several others, it will force utilities to make a significant share of their electricity from solar, wind, geothermal, water and other nonfossil fuel sources, although they can meet part of the requirement through conservation measures.

The standard applies only to investor-owned utilities and exempts rural electric cooperatives, municipal utilities, the Tennessee Valley Authority and the state of Hawaii from the mandate. “I think this was a great victory for the planet,” Mr. Udall said. He noted that more than 30 Republicans had voted for the amendment and predicted that it would be part of any energy bill that reaches the president’s desk later this year.

Thomas Kuhn, president of the Edison Electric Institute, which represents investor-owned utilities, called the House vote “very disappointing” and said it would bring big rate increases to electricity customers. Mr. Kuhn noted that the Senate had failed to pass a similar provision and that its fate in a House-Senate conference committee this fall was uncertain.

The 786-page House energy bill does not include an increase in fuel-efficiency standards for cars and light trucks that supporters called the single most effective way of cutting oil consumption and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. Sponsors vowed to bring it up again when Congress reconvenes in September.

The Senate passed energy legislation in June with numerous differences from the House package. The Senate version requires that cars and light trucks sold in the United States achieve a fleet average of 35 miles per gallon by 2020.

Democrats said if the bill that emerged from conference contained both the renewable electricity standard and the mandate for higher corporate average fuel economy, it would be the most significant energy legislation ever enacted.

The bill the House passed on Saturday sets new requirements for energy efficiency in appliances and government buildings. It also contains billions of dollars in incentives for production of alternative fuels, new research on capturing carbon emissions from refineries and coal-burning power plants and training for workers in the “green” industries of the future.

One of the bill’s goals is that the federal government, the world’s largest single energy consumer, be “carbon neutral” by 2050, meaning that all federal operations, including the Pentagon, would not produce a net increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide. The bill does not specify how the government is to achieve this.

Even if the major provisions of the House bill are enacted into law, consumers will experience few short-term effects, either in higher utility bills, more choices of fuel at the filling station or different vehicles on sale at their local car dealership. Those are longer-term goals.

But Americans will soon light their houses differently. The bill outlaws the sale of 100-watt incandescent light bulbs by 2012 and requires that all bulbs be 300 times more efficient than today’s ordinary bulbs by 2020.

The White House expressed its opposition to the Democratic energy bills, saying they did not meet their stated goals of reducing oil imports, strengthening national security, lowering energy prices and beginning to address global warming. The White House also said the tax bill unfairly singled out the oil industry.

Republican opponents of the measure echoed the White House position, saying that the package provided no new supplies of energy, would drive up fuel prices and provide billions in what they called “green pork” to support Democrats’ pet environmental projects.

“It tells us to turn the lights out, that’s what this bill does,” said Representative Don Young, Republican of Alaska. “There is no energy in this bill at all.”

Representative Joe L. Barton, who led the Republican opposition to the package on the House floor on Saturday, said the hours spent debating the bills had been wasted.

“This is really an exercise in sterile futility,” Mr. Barton said, referring to the president’s veto threat, “because this bill isn’t going anywhere.”

Rancor from the partisan feuding of the week continued to resonate Saturday as Republicans sought a vote criticizing Democrats for deleting some remarks from The Congressional Record. The move was blocked by Democrats, leading Republicans to cry “cover-up” on the House floor.

Carl Hulse contributed reporting.