



Energy Policy: 113th Congress Issues

Carl E. Behrens

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Energy policy in the United States has focused on three major goals: assuring a secure supply of energy, keeping energy costs low, and protecting the environment. In pursuit of those goals, government programs have been developed to improve the efficiency with which energy is utilized, to promote the domestic production of conventional energy sources, and to develop new energy sources, particularly renewable sources.

Implementing these programs has been controversial because of varying importance given to different aspects of energy policy. For some, dependence on imports of foreign oil, particularly from the Persian Gulf, is the primary concern; for others, the indiscriminate use of fossil fuels, whatever their origin, is most important. The contribution of burning fossil fuels to global climate change is particularly controversial. Another dichotomy is between those who see government intervention as a positive force and those who view it as a necessary evil at best.

The 112th Congress did not take up comprehensive energy legislation, but numerous bills were considered on specific energy issues. The most significant action was extension of energy tax incentives, including the Production Tax Credit (PTC) for wind energy, to January 1, 2014, as part of P.L. 112-240, The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012. In the 113th Congress, a number of issues, some of which drew attention previously, have been taken up in proposed legislation. The Energy Savings and Industrial Competitiveness Act of 2013, S. 1392 and H.R. 1616, would promote energy efficiency in buildings and industry by encouraging adoption of uniform building codes and authorize a grant program for state energy efficiency programs. The bill was reported out by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on May 13, 2013.

H.R. 3, the Northern Route Approval Act, would declare that a presidential permit would not be required for construction of the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. The bill passed the House on May 22, 2013, by a vote of 241-175. The issue of approving the Keystone XL pipeline is deeply involved in the question of global climate change, since opponents argue that Canadian oil sands production contributes excessive amounts of greenhouse gas emissions.

In November 2013 the House passed three energy related bills. H.R. 2728 would prohibit the Bureau of Land Management from enforcing rules to regulate hydraulic fracturing in any state that has its own regulations on the activity. H.R. 1900 would require the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to respond to permit applications for new natural gas pipelines within one year. H.R. 1965 would be aimed at increasing on-shore leasing of oil and gas resources on federal land.

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