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## Energy Policy — and You

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As this issue of ENERGY NEWS is being published (November 10th) there is expectation that the Republican-written *H.R. 6 Energy Policy Act of 2003* is at last being revealed to the members of the joint House-Senate Conference Committee that will decide its fate. The Democrats have 48 hours to respond, with a committee vote scheduled for Wednesday and a full vote by the House on Thursday. It is not known when the Senate will vote and the 108th Congress is tentatively scheduled to adjourn on November 21st. President Bush has urged Congress to pass the energy bill before adjournment, saying it "is needed to help reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil and enhance the nation's security".

The Senate vote is a big question. Other than a select group of Republicans no one knows exactly what's in the bill because a tight lid has been kept on the negotiations and the proposed language. There has been almost no information released about the proposed policy measures. What is known is that ANWR is not included in the draft bill. Senate Democrats had threatened to filibuster any bill containing a provision for drilling in ANWR and there was little likelihood that a vote on the final package could be made before adjournment. Under Senate rules, 60 votes are needed to overcome a filibuster but there are only 51 Republican members in the Senate.

But a filibuster might still happen. Democrats have said that if there is not enough protection for consumers or the environment they will try to amend the bill in conference. Should that fail, and they've complained bitterly about being excluded from the process, they may try to block the legislation on the Senate floor. If a filibuster

should occur, there will almost certainly be no *Energy Policy Act of 2003* and the entire process will have to be repeated in next year's 109th Congress.

That the country needs a new *Energy Policy Act* is not in question. The current one, the *Energy Policy Act of 1992*, has outlived its applicability and usefulness and does not reflect the nation's needs, or technologies, which have changed dramatically over the last few years. In particular, the nation is more vulnerable to the vagaries of oil and gas supplies, to the sources of fuel supplies and questions about coal and nuclear power, and to climate change and old power plants as worsening situations. The grid is old and unreliable for today's needs, thousands of miles of new gas pipelines and liquefaction terminals are needed to meet burgeoning demand even with some consideration given to renewables, and energy efficiency is still being largely ignored. And new technologies such as hydrogen fuel cells and hybrid-electric vehicles were, at best, imagined concepts back in 1992.

But clearly everyone is looking out for his or her own in Washington. A good example has been the battle between two very powerful Republicans—Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa), chairman of the Finance Committee and Rep. Bill Thomas (R-Calif.), chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Each holds tremendous power to authorize spending, and they've been fighting like cats and dogs over how ethanol should be subsidized. Sen. Grassley wants to improve the tax structure for Midwest corn growers to produce at least 5 billion gallons of ethanol annually, up from the 2.7 billion gallons the gasoline

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industry is required to blend today. Rep. Thomas has made it clear he is not a fan of the new ethanol mandate. The bickering held up the bill for days.

Seeing the impasse the White House intervened to get the process moving forward again, but the upshot is that overall the bill contains \$16 billion in handouts for such items as oil drilling, building an Alaska pipeline, coal, nuclear power and other forms of energy such as ethanol.

As I read about these developments, I have to ask “if your elected Representatives and Senators have little or no say, what chance do you have for a say in how your energy future should unfold?”

Applying the famous adage “act locally, think globally”, it’s easy to discern that energy independence or sustainability must begin at the community level. How we build our cities, the energy measures we employ in our cities, the planning we do to build sustainable cities, determines not only community energy demand but also what the sources of energy will be.

Taking it to the next step, the Fort Lauderdale-based non-profit organization Third Planet has created its “Community Power in the 21st Century” program to help communities understand how their cities can be built more energy sustainably.

Third Planet’s strategic four-phase program has been proposed for selected municipalities in South Florida. Its premise is that if Florida is to protect the health, enhance the economic prosperity, and maintain the social well-being of its people, it is important to develop a collaborative process to help communities understand the issues, identify the alternative choices available to them, articulate a community vision for its energy future, and formulate viable strategies for having an effective voice in the planning process.

The objective is to establish groups of committed stakeholders to formulate, initiate and implement energy action plans of their own making. The plans will be based on community consensus, and grounded in best practices energy and environmental engineering, relevant law, and economic analysis.

The only way to move into the future is to recognize both at the individual and community level that the future is in our hands and ours alone. We can wait to see what’s handed down by the Energy Policy Act of 2003 but it’s more important to recognize that our real energy choices and decisions begin at home, not in Washington. •