

Conference Committee Meeting held on the Energy Policy Modernization Act September 8, 2016

House and Senate conferees for the Energy Policy Modernization Act met this September to discuss the progress they had made on reconciling the House (H.R. 8) and Senate (S. 2012) versions of the bill.

Senator Lisa Murkowski (R - AK), author of the Senate version of the bill and Chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, opened the business meeting by acknowledging several conflicting provisions within the two bills. She noted that many conferees were divided on issues such as hydraulic fracturing, renewable energy infrastructure, and natural gas exports. The last time Congress passed a comprehensive energy bill was in 2005. Since then, advances in energy technology and scientific understanding, including the surge in natural gas production brought on by hydraulic fracturing and the increased emphasis on renewable energy under the Obama Administration, have created a radically different environment for energy policy. Many conferees argued for expansion of America's natural gas extraction and exportation infrastructure through expanded hydraulic fracturing and more streamlined pipeline permitting processes, while others argued for a move to a more renewable-based energy portfolio.

Many Members did agree, however, on the forestry policy laid out in the bill, which would provide funding and expedited approval procedures for proper forest management and wildfire prevention projects, as well as the reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LCWF), albeit with some disagreement over whether the LWCF should be revised or subject to periodic review after its reauthorization.

Overall, the conferees were cautiously optimistic that the resulting bill could eventually reach the President's desk before the end of the 114th Congress.

Sources: Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Congress.gov
