

Nuclear Power Plants and Drilling in ANWR on the Agenda as Congress Readies Energy Policy

ByCarolynn Race

In the last legislative session, the House and Senate failed to come to an agreement on U.S. energy policy. There were many points of contention in last year's debate – including disagreements over whether to require utilities to use more solar, wind, and other renewable sources of power to generate electricity or whether to allow drilling in the Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Additionally, divergence viewpoints on the issues of climate change and vehicle emissions' requirements further inhibited Congressmembers from coming to agreement.

As a result of last year's disagreements, both Congressional chambers are again deliberating on U.S. energy policy this year. On April 11th, the House passed an omnibus energy bill, HR 6, by a vote of 247-175. On April 29th, the Senate Energy and Public Works Committee passed its version, S. 14, by a vote of 13 to 10, with only one Democrat, Senator Mary Landrieu, D-LA, voting with the Republican majority. S. 14, the bill passed by the Senate Energy Committee, is expected to go to the Senate floor in early May. Similar points of disagreement between the chambers continue this year – and those issues could lead to another gridlock situation when the House and Senate have to reconcile their respective bills later this year.

The House-passed version would allow drilling in ANWR and would more heavily promote fossil fuel development. As the *Washington Post* noted, the Senate Energy and Public Works Committee's legislation would delay a plan by federal energy regulators to standardize the access and management of electric power transmission lines across the country. In addition, it calls for federal support for the construction of six nuclear power plants, incentives to encourage natural gas development in the Gulf of Mexico, and loan guarantees for the Alaska natural gas pipeline project. The Senate Committee did not deal with some of the most contentious issues of the legislation, including climate change and ANWR, though as an amendment to the budget resolution, the full Senate already voted in March to oppose drilling in ANWR. The vote was 52-48.

As the Senate continues to move forward with this legislation and pending Senate passage, as both chambers prepare to reconcile their disagreements in a conference committee, it is important to reflect upon what the PC(USA) General Assembly has said about energy. At the 213th General Assembly (2001), commissioners adopted a resolution, "Call to Halt Mass Extinction," which stated:

Our biblical faith story tells us that the human creature (adam) was fashioned by God from the earth (adamah) and charged to serve the earth and protect it, to

draw sustenance from earth with care (Gen. 2:4b-8, 15); and human beings share the earth with many millions of other species, whose diversity and interdependence make life possible and good.

Human sin originally ruined our relationship not only to God and each other but to the rest of creation (Gen. 3:17b-19); and our human alienation from creation shows itself in the fact that biodiversity in recent decades has been degraded and diminished at unprecedented speed from the impact of human numbers, technologies, and industries, as humans have proceeded heedlessly and disrespectfully in appropriating God's gifts in creation.

The resolution called on the U.S., other governments, national and multinational corporations, and others to desist from the large-scale projects, such as old-growth timber cutting and forest fragmentation, megadam construction, and oil exploration and drilling in vulnerable regions, that devastate ecosystems, threaten wildlife survival, and displace indigenous people. In addition, the resolution called upon the U.S. Congress and the Bush administration, together with industry, agriculture, and individuals, to face the compelling urgency to promote energy conservation and efficiency and also to accelerate the transition from a fossil fuel base to a solar-hydrogen base for the economy.

Go to the Presby Legislative Action Center, <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/home/>, and find out how to contact your Senators or call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121. Share our policy positions with them – and urge them to support conservation over exploitation in this year's energy policy legislation.