2020 Policy Preview: Energy & Environment
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As the Second Session of the 116th Congress begins in earnest, the energy and environmental sector is expected to receive significant attention both legislatively and politically.

In the final weeks of 2019, not long after President Trump issued formal notification of the United States’ intention to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord, Speaker Nancy Pelosi spoke at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Madrid. The Speaker was joined in Madrid by four committee chairs¹ who collectively highlighted the House of Representative’s resolve² to act decisively on the issue of climate change in 2020.

Weeks later, House Energy and Commerce (E&C) Chairman Frank Pallone (D-NJ), launched 2020 with the announcement of the legislative framework³ that will be a primary focus on the Committee’s work: the CLEAN Future Act. On January 28, E&C released their comprehensive discussion draft⁴ which focuses on achieving an ambitious climate goal: America realizing net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050. The E&C proposal requires retail electricity suppliers to ramp up its proportion of electricity produced from “clean” sources beginning in 2022, culminating with the 100 percent clean energy target by 2050. At its core, the draft proposal relies upon an energy credit formula for electricity generators producing below the .82 metric ton of CO₂ per MWH threshold.

The House’s far-reaching plan is built on a foundation of multiple hearings and intensive legislative groundwork the committee laid throughout the last year and is expected to be one of a handful of items that will dominate the committee’s calendar in the weeks ahead. House leadership, recognizing its current window of opportunity and driven by domestic politics and global pressures, can be expected to prioritize any package the committee passes. That said, a House-passed package would unquestionably face an uphill battle in the Senate.

While the core of the CLEAN Future Act will be focus of ardent debate⁵ between interests on both the right and the left, the discussion draft contains numerous bipartisan proposals – such as reauthorization of the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) program – that will be useful in driving bipartisan, bicameral conversations on energy policy amid a presidential election year.

¹ https://www.politico.com/news/2019/12/02/pelosi-to-climate-conference-were-still-in-paris-agreement-074756
In the Senate, Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee Chairman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) in her last year as chair of the committee, is pressing the upper chamber to prioritize a bipartisan energy package⁶. The chairman and Ranking Member Joe Manchin (D-WV) have indicated a desire to advance bipartisan bills to the Senate floor following the conclusion of the impeachment proceedings. In 2019, ENR advanced approximately 70 bills out of committee⁷ including several bills that received overwhelming bipartisan support. A bipartisan energy package is on the shortlist of legislative items that Leader Mitch McConnell is expected to consider to fill out the Senate’s legislative calendar.

While the energy sector will continue to be source of voracious debate on both sides of the aisle in 2020, there continues to be optimism⁸ that bipartisan bills can move forward despite the partisanship that has stalled progress on a variety of other legislative fronts this session.

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⁶ https://www.eenews.net/stories/1062022339
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