A Flawed Energy Bill Passes

After months of intense debate, Congress passed an important piece of energy legislation in December 2007. The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 mandates significant increases in vehicle fuel economy standards for the first time in a generation. Improved fuel economy will lower consumer costs, reduce our dependence on oil and significantly reduce global warming pollution.

Unfortunately, the bill also demonstrates that special interests, including the fossil fuel industry and electrical utilities, still have powerful champions in Congress.

While the bill promotes new conservation and efficiency measures, Congress stripped out a requirement to move to 15% clean electricity by 2020. Extending tax incentives for wind, solar and other clean energy sources did not survive the negotiations, nor did removing tax breaks for the oil and natural gas industries.

While the renewable fuels provisions are a long overdue recognition of the need to move away from fossil fuels, the dramatic increase in corn ethanol production could have serious negative consequences, including increased water pollution from runoff and fertilizer use. Congress rightly said no to subsidies for converting coal to liquid fuels — a process that uses vast amounts of water, sharply increases global warming emissions, and requires dramatic new coal production to turn coal into diesel or gasoline for vehicles.

Polls demonstrate that the American people are way ahead of elected officials in being ready to move away from outdated means of energy production. Vocal public support will overcome opposition from entrenched special interests.

Link to our website at www.cleanwateraction for more information, and tell your federal representatives to fix the mistakes of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 in future legislation: Write to:

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Protect Citizen Review

Virginia’s Citizen Environmental Boards (Air, Water and Waste) protect the environment and human health by reviewing and improving permits with a major impact on air and water quality. Tribute to their effectiveness is that polluters and their government allies view them as nuisances and are trying to get rid of them.

HB3113 (aka “the Board Elimination Bill”) was introduced in January 2007 and would have eliminated Virginia’s Citizen Environmental Boards. A substitute board, stripped of all authority to act on permits, would have replaced the three current boards.

In place of Citizen Boards, specific members of industry, the Governor and certain members of his staff propose to hand over permitting authority to one person — the Director of the Department of Environmental Quality. This change in public policy would further distance citizens from the projects that most affect them.

The 2007 bill had the support of the Governor and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). However, the General Assembly was not convinced that the bill was acceptable and put in place a “Reenactment Clause”, requiring it to be passed again in 2008 before HB3113 would become law. The Reenactment Clause was passed to allow both sides of the issue to meet and see if a compromise could be reached. No compromise was reached, and those devoted to the protection of Virginia’s natural resources remain opposed to HB3113. Write to:

Governor Tim Kaine, Office of the Governor
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219

State Senators
Senate of Virginia Building
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, VA 23218

Delegates
General Assembly
P.O. Box 404
Richmond, VA 23218
Annapolis Session Kicks Off

Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund

Last year, Clean Water Action members pushed for passage of the “Green Fund,” and won partial victory during the Fall 2007 special session called to address the state’s budget deficit. Maryland’s governor and state legislature created the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund (as the “Green Fund” was renamed), an annual $50 million appropriation for programs that will reduce polluted run-off from farms, and from urban and suburban community streets, parking lots and other impervious surfaces. In part due to the brevity and purpose of the special session, the legislative details of how the money would be spent and who would be accountable for monitoring the expenditures passed the House but stalled in the Senate.

The newly created fund will provide a fresh source of money for targeting money towards restoration projects that address tributary-specific needs. For many Maryland communities, fixing bad stormwater management is difficult, as the old, outdated management designs are expensive to fix. The Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund, if managed effectively, will provide money for such efforts.

Global Warming Solutions Act

With the White House failing to act at the federal level, it is up to the states to act to reduce emissions as quickly as possible to reduce the catastrophic effects of climate change. Senator Paul Pinsky (D, Prince George’s County) will be introducing legislation similar to last year’s Global Warming Solutions Act, requiring Maryland to put into place programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2020.

Put the Brakes On The Inter-County Connector

Maryland can be certain that it will fail to achieve the necessary reductions goals of greenhouse gas emissions if it builds wasteful highway projects such as the proposed Inter-County Connector (ICC). Opponents of the boondoggle have filed an appeal of a lower court decision that approved the project, and it is likely that the judicial argument on the legal justification for the highway will go on for months, if not years. Even if extraordinary care is taken to reduce the pollution caused by the roadway itself, the induced sprawl of the ICC is certain to cause harm to the headwaters of the Anacostia River and Rock Creek, and therefore to the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay.

The added capacity for cars will facilitate an increase in vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) in the state, and work against efforts to reduce dependency on cars and their associated pollutants. State legislators looking for ways to save money could pull funding of the ICC, which eventually will likely cost the state over $3 billion dollars for very little benefit, and untold environmental cost above and beyond that extraordinary cost.

Urge your state representatives to vote for you in 2008 to provide effective resource to reduce agricultural and stormwater run-off pollution and restore water quality standards to our creeks, rivers and bays, to reduce Maryland’s carbon footprint and stop funding wasteful and environmentally harmful road projects.

Write to:

Governor Martin O’Malley
Office of the Governor
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

State Senators
Senate Office Bldg.
Annapolis, MD 21401

State Delegates
House Office Bldg.
Annapolis, MD 21401
Another Recycling Battle In Dover

The Delaware state legislature went back into session on January 8, 2008, and some representatives are up to their old tricks. House Bill 278, which would keep easily-recyclable “yard waste” flowing into garbage dumps. The bill is co-sponsored by Representative Greg Lavelle, Senator Patti Blevins, and Reps. Debbie Hudson, Bill Oberle, and Bob Gilligan. Gilligan is the House Democratic Party leader. Lavelle, the prime sponsor, is an influential Republican.

The bill, if enacted would override a permit issued by the Department of Natural Resources (DNREC) and increase the maximum height of the infamous Cherry Island garbage dump from 195 feet to 202 feet. (DNREC renewed the permit for this dump over strong community opposition.). The legislation also would prohibit the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DENREC) from excluding yard waste from any landfill in the State of Delaware unless he or she has been given consent to do so by the General Assembly. Delaware members of Clean Water Action will recall that we have opposed this proposal before. Members of the Delaware legislature and Governor Minner need to be contacted to defeat this proposal that will dump easily recyclable yard waste and needlessly expand the capacity for the Cherry Island Landfill.

Write to:

Governor Ruth Ann Minner
William Penn Street
Tatnall Building, 2nd Floor
Dover, DE 19901

State Senators and Representatives
P.O. Box 1401
Dover, DE 19903

Volunteers Needed!!!

Want to help our staff advocate for our national, regional or local programs?

In Delaware or the Greater Baltimore area:
Call Aaron Montzes at 410-235-8808
or email amintzes@cleanwater.org

Near Washington or elsewhere in the region:
Call Andy Fellows at 202-895-0420, x102
or email afellows@cleanwater.org

January–February Update 2008

Clean Water Action is a national citizens’ organization working for clean, safe and affordable water, prevention of health-threatening pollution, creation of environmentally-safe jobs and businesses, and empowerment of people to make democracy work. Clean Water Action organizes strong grassroots groups and coalitions, and campaigns to elect environmental candidates and to solve environmental and community problems.

This update was prepared for our Chesapeake regional members (in Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia) who contribute at the sustaining level of $60 or more.

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Phosphate Ban Proposed In The District of Columbia

D.C. City Councilmember Mary Cheh (District 3) has introduced a bill that would limit the amount of phosphorous in dishwasher detergents to half a percent by weight, less than what is found in most brands on store shelves in the District. A 20-year-old D.C. law bans the sale of household cleaners that contain phosphates, except for dishwasher detergents. Cheh’s legislation addresses that exception.

The D.C. measure is similar to measures that some states have considered or adopted, including Maryland, to restrict the sale of dishwasher detergents that contain phosphates, the additive that is harming Rock Creek, the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay, all downstream of District residents’ dishwashing wastewater.

Please write to the Mayor and Council and urge passage of this legislation:

Write to:

Mayor Adrian Fenty and Members of the District of Columbia City Council (Chairman Vincent Gray, Carol Schwartz, David Catania, Phil Mendelson, Kwame Brown, Jim Graham, Jack Evans, Mary Cheh, Muriel Bowser, Harry Thomas, Jr., Tommy Wells, Yvette Alexander and Marion Barry)

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20004