

Ways and Means to wade back into emissions debate

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The House Ways and Means Committee returns to the global warming debate Wednesday with a hearing on the scientific objectives for major climate legislation.

Chairman Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) said the hearing fits in with his committee's plan to play a role in the crafting of House legislation that sets mandatory limits on greenhouse gases.

"The development of climate change legislation will be a priority for the Ways and Means Committee during the 111th Congress," Rangel said last week. "The committee must define the environmental objectives that we hope to achieve with climate change legislation before we can design such legislation. These objectives must be based on science."

Rangel's committee did not release names of witnesses for the hearing, though it did invite written submissions from the public that will go into the record.

This is Rangel's third hearing to focus on the global warming policy debate since Democrats took control of Congress in January 2007. Last fall, Rangel's panel heard testimony from Carol Browner and Peter Orszag, two officials who have since taken key positions in the Obama White House ([E&E Daily](#), Sept. 19, 2008).

Rangel's interest in climate change raises questions about how he will work with House Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), who has outlined his own plans for a markup on comprehensive climate and energy legislation before Memorial Day. The Ways and Means Committee has primary jurisdiction over tax issues, and many see the new climate package as a revenue raiser that will require some degree of input from Rangel.

"I think the Ways and Means Committee may feel pretty strongly about a number of the tax provisions," said House Democratic Caucus Chairman John Larson of Connecticut earlier this month. "But I think even the Ways and Means Committee can move quickly on it also."

To date, Democratic leaders have yet to spell out their plans for how they will pull together the House climate bill before it reaches the floor. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has pledged a first-ever floor debate this year, and sources eyeing the congressional calendar say the vote could even happen before the August recess.

Another large question looming over House Democrats is whether to advance a cap-and-trade plan or a carbon tax.

Pelosi, Waxman and Senate Environment and Public Works Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) have all said they would prefer addressing climate change through a cap-and-trade policy.

Rangel did not take a position during an interview last September. "We can't make any decisions now," he said.

But other key players in the climate debate have left open some wiggle room on the question that divides economists, environmentalists and a range of other vested interests.

"There are going to be a number of different ways to go after this problem," President Obama said during a press conference last week in Ottawa with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. "You know, we've suggested a cap-and-trade system. There are other countries who've discussed the possibilities of a carbon tax."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said last week he hoped to hold a floor debate on climate change before the end of the summer. "That could involve cap and trade or a carbon tax," he told the Associated Press ([Greenwire](#), Feb. 20).

Environmental groups have been pushing for years for Congress to enact a cap-and-trade bill, arguing that a tax cannot guarantee that heat-trapping emissions will fall to any specific level. "A cap guarantees environmental results and a tax does not," said Tony Kreindler, a spokesman at the Environmental Defense Fund.

Robert Shapiro, a former Commerce Department undersecretary for economic affairs during the Clinton administration, counters that a carbon tax could be written high enough that it could meet scientific objections, primarily by using the tax's revenue to fund the types of energy technology breakthroughs needed to quickly and sharply curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Shapiro, who now runs Sonecon, an economic consulting firm, welcomed Rangel's open-ended approach to the issue. "I think he's laying a predicate for serious actions sooner, rather than later," he said. "And he's laying a predicate, I think, consequentially, for a broader debate on how we achieve the goals."

Schedule: The hearing is Wednesday, Feb. 25, at 10 a.m. in 1100 Longworth.