

Boucher Exit Interview

TOWARD CRAFTING A NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY // BY MARTIN ROSENBERG

▶ DEMOCRATIC REP. RICK BOUCHER WAS recently moved from a key committee post in the U.S. House of Representatives where he helped craft energy legislation to a new assignment as part of a realignment ordered by the Democrats controlling Congress. *EnergyBiz* late last year sat down with Boucher to discuss pending national energy policy issues. The comments of the Virginia congressman, edited for style and length, follow.



Rep. Rick Boucher (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

ENERGYBIZ Are you confident that at last we are developing a national energy policy?

BOUCHER Yes, we've been seeing it come into place over the last several years. The legislation that became law in December 2007 is the biggest step forward in energy efficiency that our country has ever taken. The energy-efficiency provisions of that new law alone will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 10 billion tons by the year 2030, and that is roughly equal to the total emissions of all of the vehicles on America's highways today each year. Now, more is necessary. Putting a price on carbon dioxide emissions, which we'll do with our cap-and-trade program, will be another critical component. That price on carbon will encourage large-scale investments in low-carbon emitting technologies. We're going to see the creation of millions of jobs.

ENERGYBIZ With the Democrats controlling the

White House and Congress, do you think things are going to move faster in the next few years?

BOUCHER They clearly will. I don't think there's any doubt about that. President Obama has indicated that one of his top priorities is climate change control. We have broadened Democratic majorities in the House and in the Senate, and those majorities will be more receptive than in past years to adopting the control program. I would rate the chances for carbon dioxide controls passing in the first two years at better than 50 percent and in the first four years, if it doesn't happen in the first two, better than 80 percent. So the controls clearly are coming.

ENERGYBIZ And a carbon tax is dead?

BOUCHER It's going to be a cap-and-trade program. The carbon tax creates its own set of problems. You don't get the assured level of carbon dioxide reduction that a control program gives you, because some emitters would simply treat the tax as a cost of doing business.

ENERGYBIZ You want the power industry to step forward and advise Congress on renewable portfolio standards. Why is that important?

BOUCHER It's important because it's going to pass. I honestly do not favor a federal renewable portfolio standard, because this matter is much better handled on a state-by-state basis.

ENERGYBIZ Some states are not doing anything.

BOUCHER Well half the states have. The reason that those that haven't, have not, is because they do not have adequate renewable resources. It's not a good thing to do at the federal level. But we learned from our experience of the last year that there's going to be a renewable portfolio standard at the federal level. Now what this industry needs to do is come forward with its own proposal and we need to fight to get it enacted into law.

ENERGYBIZ Are you optimistic about energy policy going forward?

BOUCHER I am. We have enormous opportunities. We face huge challenges. Passing policies at a time of a weakened economy presents special challenges. But I have great confidence in the Obama administration. He is absolutely brilliant, and he has collected around him knowledgeable advisors.