

Ecologic

-the green hornet

More bills

The new and improved Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act of 1978 is here under the current name of the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (aka ACES, HR 2454, Waxman-Markley Energy Bill, etc.) and wending its way through the narrow (or maybe wide) corridors of the Nation's Capitol; all twelve-hundred and one pages of it. Actually it has already been kicked upstairs by congress and its now looking for Senate approval – I think that's the way it works. Go to <http://www.opencongress.org/bill/111-h2454/show> if you'd like to see how the parties have voted and view citizen input.

I downloaded the document and am on page four, which is probably where most of our public officials fell asleep too. To get a sense of what twelve hundred pages looks like, it's about three reams of copy paper which allows for some fluff due to the printing process. However, this bill is double spaced and in pretty big type so it's not as onerous as it sounds but I'm doubtful I'll get through it all, at least in this lifetime. Actually, there is no shortage of discussion surrounding this event on the internet; google logged in 111,000 for an exact match of the bill's title and bing came up with 2,230,000 hits for HR 2454. But just because there is an overabundance of well qualified views on the subject, it won't stop this column and it's under qualified perspective,

As you might guess, there are many words in a twelve hundred and one page manuscript; lots of sections and subsections and titles and roman numerals. The mission statement of the bill is represented as:

A Bill "To create clean energy jobs, achieve energy independence, reduce global warming pollution and transition to a clean energy economy.

Certainly noble intentions and you'd have to be an awfully bad person to disagree with them. However, the key is execution - and take it from someone who is listening to a book on tape about execution and is intimately familiar with how not to execute, execution is tough. In the bill, there seem to be all sorts of standards and goals set forth regarding green buildings, transportation mandates carbon capture and sequestration rules but the big one seems to be the "Global Warming Pollution Reduction Program" and all of the vague detail that follows. In Section 713 there are terms like "Greenhouse Gas Registry" & "Climate Registry", which seem a little unsettling but in the end, it may be possible to reduce this all to a few points to consider.

Although the jury may be forever sequestered on the matter, fossil fuel combustion has been deemed inappropriate and efforts are under way to minimize and potentially ban the activity. It's unfortunate because burning gas and oil and coal is the cheapest most convenient form of energy we have and replacements will have to be found.

In order to surmount inertia amongst the energy producers, incentives are being introduced to move away from fossil fuels and towards other forms of energy 'production'. These incentives are being applied as economic penalties through a 'Cap and Trade' government taxing/artificial market type system. It has been said that this is not a tax but the bill is pretty clear that money will flow to the government and however you want to define tax; this seems to fit the bill.

As mentioned before, this has been tried in Europe and depending on the source; the results seem to continue to be conflicting. On the surface, the whole Cap and Trade program seems unnatural and it will probably take a lot of bureaucratic coaxing to make it fly, even at a low level. Why don't we just call it a tax - apply it like a tax and get it over with? The penalty intent and effect will be obvious and it will have the same consequence; it will cost you more to use fossil fuels at all levels so you'll want to figure out how to minimize your use of them. I did see that proponents of a gas tax are backing off because polls indicate that people are not in favor of a gas tax; maybe they're just not polling the right people.

There is much, much more to be said about this matter and I'm sure you'll be hearing it, in fact it may be debated and codified to the point where it won't matter any more and we'll all be toast, popsicles, or if we survive; scratching our heads wondering just what the hell we had been thinking. Anyway, I really think that we're all trying to do what we think is the right thing and this will ultimately shake out in some form or another, in the meantime, let's keep recycling, it still seems safe.