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House Gives Nod to Waxman as New Chairman of Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) will succeed Rep. John Dingell (D-MI) as the new chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce for the 111th Congress. The Democratic Caucus voted 137-122 on November 20 to replace Dingell, who has served as chairman or ranking member of the committee since 1981. The caucus vote ratified yesterday's Democratic Steering and Policy Committee vote of 25-22 in favor of Waxman.

Waxman, a strong environmental advocate and second-ranking Democrat on the committee, announced his intent to challenge Dingell for the chairmanship shortly after the November 4th general elections. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1974 and is the current chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

Observers have noted that the leadership change could alter the committee's dynamics on several key policy issues. For example, Waxman and Dingell differ on legislative approaches to climate change. Waxman introduced the Safe Climate Act of 2007 (H.R. 1590), a bill that would set greenhouse gas emissions reduction

targets and timetables more stringent than those in the cap-and-trade discussion draft proposed by Dingell and Rick Boucher (D-VA), chairman of the Energy and Air Quality Subcommittee.

Congressman Dingell has been offered the position of chairman emeritus of the committee. The duties of this appointment are not yet clearly defined. It is also not clear whether Dingell will use his seniority to obtain a subcommittee chairman post. The assignment of subcommittee chairmen is at the discretion of committee Chairman Waxman, but historically has respected seniority.

In that regard, Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA), who outranks Boucher in seniority on the committee, is rumored to be a possible replacement for Boucher as Energy and Air Quality Subcommittee chairman. Such a move could be prompted if the House does not adopt a resolution reauthorizing the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, which Markey chaired during the last Congress.

If you have questions about how these or other developments on Capitol Hill might impact your business, please contact us.

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