

Energy & Sustainability Washington Updates — May 2020

April 29, 2020 || By [R. Neal Martin](#)

Phase 4 Stimulus Negotiations Underway

Following two weeks of negotiation, House and Senate leadership announced on Tuesday, April 21 that they had reached agreement on a \$484 billion interim stimulus package –the Paycheck Protection Program Increase Act of 2020. The bill shores up various programs created and funded in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Phase 3 of the federal response to the pandemic).

With most Senators in their home states, the bill was approved in the Senate by voice vote on April 21 and sent to the House of Representatives where it was approved on April 23 in a bipartisan vote of 388-5 (with one member voting “present”). President Trump signed the bill on April 25.

With the interim stimulus now enacted, the debate will turn to the next round (Phase 4) of federal response to the pandemic. President Trump has tweeted that “we will begin discussions on the next Legislative Initiative with fiscal relief to State/Local Governments for lost revenues from COVID 19, much needed Infrastructure Investments for Bridges, Tunnels, Broadband, Tax Incentives for Restaurants, Entertainment, Sports, and Payroll Tax Cuts to increase Economic Growth.”

In a joint statement regarding COVID 3.5, Speaker Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Schumer (D-NY) said that COVID 4 should be “transformative and far-reaching”.

The scope of the Phase 4 stimulus is still being negotiated, but there is a push to include support for renewable energy and energy grid efforts. As outlined in the [April Energy & Sustainability Washington Updates](#), advocates for clean and renewable energy are urging that Phase 4 provide support for solar, wind, electric vehicles, energy storage, and energy efficiency. An April 23 letter from five Senate Republicans to Senate Majority Leader McConnell urges that any extension of renewable energy tax provisions for wind and solar be matched with support for fossil fuels.

Although there is no deadline, the general expectation is that Congress will seek to finalize the Phase 4 stimulus by the end of May. Interested parties should be engaging with their congressional delegations and the relevant congressional committees now to ensure their priorities receive consideration.

Bipartisan Bicameral Support for Rural Electric Cooperatives

A bipartisan group of 43 Senators and 164 members of the House of Representatives are urging the Treasury Department and the Small Business Administration (SBA) to clarify that rural electric cooperatives are eligible for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which was created under the CARES Act to support small businesses and help them maintain payroll and cover expenses during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

[Read the Senate letter here...](#)

[Read the House letter here...](#)

Governors Seek Federal Support for Biofuel Industry

As the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically reduced consumption of ethanol, the Governors of Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and South Dakota wrote to Secretary of Agriculture Perdue, urging that “As the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) considers the allocation of additional funds provided to the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stabilization (CARES) Act we ask that you use this authority provided to assist the biofuel industry.” The governors say they are “supportive of the proposals the biofuel industry has put forward to reimburse feedstocks, and also believe that adding additional CCC funds to the Higher-Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program will drive future biofuel demand.”

Senate Democrats Challenge Recent EPA Actions in Letter to Administrator Wheeler

18 Democratic senators wrote to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) raising concerns about recent actions they say will worsen air pollution and could, according to a recent study from the Harvard School of Public Health, result in higher death rates among COVID-19 patients. Citing recent EPA actions regarding automotive emissions and national ambient air quality standards, the senators ask EPA Administrator Wheeler to respond by April 21 to a number of questions about what the agency is doing to enforce existing air pollution requirements, improve air quality, and study the link between poor air quality and worse outcomes for COVID-19 patients.

[Read the letter here...](#)

House Democrats Also Question EPA on Relaxation of Regulations

House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Pallone (D-NJ), Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior and Environment Chairwoman Betty McCollum (D-MN) wrote to EPA Administrator Wheeler demanding transparency and additional changes to the Agency’s recently-announced guidance relaxing the enforcement of legal obligations during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Chairs also requested information about whether the EPA has evaluated the effects the new policy will have on human health and the environment.

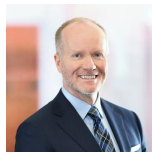
[Read the letter here...](#)

Department of Energy COVID-19 Response Resources

The Department of Energy (DOE) maintains a regularly updated webpage outlining the DOE response to the pandemic, along with COVID-19 resources that include government web links, energy sector links, and state, local, tribal, and territorial web links. The page also includes Frequently Asked Questions.

[Access the DOE resource here...](#)

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