

## CLIMATE

### Select committee highlights stark outlook for action

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House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis Chairwoman Kathy Castor (D-Fla.) during a hearing yesterday. Select Committee on the Climate Crisis

The Select Committee on the Climate Crisis' fourth meeting yesterday was the most policy-focused hearing the panel has held to date, but it also served to illustrate the stalled state of play in climate politics.

Out of the dozens of policies to ramp up renewables offered by witnesses, few, if any, have a certain path forward in the next 18 months, and many are unlikely to even get real consideration in the 116th Congress.

And although it was at times less partisan than the committee's previous hearings, Democrats primarily focused on scaling up renewables, while Republicans talked up the hurdles — long permitting times for transmission and renewable projects and the nation's lacking production of the rare earth minerals used for solar panels and batteries.

Altogether it was an example of how heavy the political lift is for even modest climate policies in a divided Congress, with lawmakers thinking about how to shape the energy industry on decidedly different tracks.

It comes as Democrats consider extensions for the wind production tax credit and the solar investment tax credit, which are set to phase out in 2019 and 2022, respectively (*[E&E Daily](#)*, Feb. 28).

Ranking member Garret Graves (R-La.) said the two sides are essentially talking about the same thing, but he added that the GOP tried to bring "logic or practicality to the debate."

"What they're doing is they're out there talking about these very, very lofty goals," Graves said after the hearing. "And what we're doing is saying, 'OK, what are the steps you need to take to get there?'"

But while Graves spent part of his time at the hearing blasting tax credit and carbon tax policies that "distort" the market, he did not rule out supporting extensions for the solar and wind incentives.

"I am OK providing the right incentives, contingent upon us being able to demonstrate the return on investment to taxpayers," Graves told E&E News.

## **Climate Solutions Caucus**

Something he did rule out, however, was joining the updated Climate Solutions Caucus, which is expected to be relaunched next week.

"At this point no, but let me be clear, I feel like I'm pretty neck-deep in trying to address climate solutions," Graves said.

The bipartisan group's two co-chairs — Reps. Ted Deutch (D-Fla.) and Francis Rooney (R-Fla.) — confirmed yesterday they plan to formally restart the group, likely with standards for membership.

The caucus swelled to nearly 100 members in the last Congress, half Republican and half Democrat, but was widely criticized in the environmental community for admitting members with largely anti-environmental voting records.

A project of the Citizens' Climate Lobby, it lost dozens of GOP members in the 2018 midterms, and although it had been widely expected to return, the caucus remained in flux for months as Democratic leadership embarked on an aggressive climate messaging campaign.

Rooney said he wouldn't be able to replace all the lost members immediately, but he's targeting Republicans who have talked up climate change in recent months, including Reps. Greg Walden of Oregon or John Shimkus of Illinois.

## **Points of agreement**

The outlook for the wind and solar credits is unclear, but Democrats on the House Ways and Means Committee are eyeing extending a host of energy incentives for three years, which could include the wind and solar credits ([\*\*\*E&E Daily\*\*\*](#), June 12).

Despite the competing messaging strategies, select committee Chairwoman Kathy Castor (D-Fla.) struck an optimistic tone about the legislative path forward. She noted that Rep. Buddy Carter (R-Ga.) spent a significant amount of his questioning time talking up solar energy expansions in rural areas of Georgia.

"There's plenty of common ground," Castor told reporters after the hearing. "You hear them talking about innovation, and here were some expert witnesses that were there to say, 'This is the future, this is happening now.'"

Castor cited battery storage, which several witnesses said should get a tax incentive to help scale up the technology to be paired with intermittent renewables.

Tom Kiernan, president and CEO of the American Wind Energy Association, said his organization supports the "Energy Storage Tax Incentive and Deployment Act," a bill from Rep. Mike Doyle (D-Pa.) to create an energy storage investment tax credit.

"We do believe that wind, solar and storage, and natural gas can work very, very effectively together," he told the panel. "We do think storage costs have come down dramatically, but it would benefit from a credit that would further stimulate cost reductions and deployment of storage, whether on the grid or with particular projects."

Another point of consensus among the select committee witnesses was the need for grid improvements to accommodate more renewables.

Kiernan also recommended either a carbon tax or a technology-neutral incentive based on carbon emissions, while other witnesses called for a federal clean energy standard, though none is likely to get traction in Congress anytime soon.

As ever, perhaps the biggest area of agreement was energy research, particularly at the Department of Energy's Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy, which has received record funding the last two years.

But there are plenty of signs that it's the furthest Republicans would be willing to go, particularly as many on other committees use the climate debate as an opportunity to blast the Green New Deal.

For instance, Rep. Gary Palmer (R-Ala.), a member of House Republican leadership, has consistently used his spot on the select committee to cast doubt on science that says greenhouse gases are dangerously warming the planet.

"I'm all for renewable power — I'm fine with that — but there's certain engineering realities that we're going to have to face," Palmer, the chairman of the Republican Policy Committee, said during yesterday's hearing.

"And to tell the American public we're going to have a Green New Deal that puts us at all renewables in 10 years, frankly, I think is doing the public a great disservice."