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ENERGY

Will Senate bill make it to Rendell?

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Major differences remain between the state House and Senate on comprehensive energy legislation to satisfy Gov. Ed Rendell.

The Senate on Wednesday passed its version of an energy plan by a 44-5 vote. That bill now goes to the House, where nothing will happen until at least Jan. 14, when the House legislative session resumes.

Rendell said the Senate bill falls well short of what he wants.

Senate Republicans say their plan, while certain to be modified in the House, gives the governor his best shot at getting something done.

"There's a lot more reason to believe this has a chance," Pat Henderson, director of the Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee, said of the Senate plan. "We worked very closely with Senate Democrats to get the vast majority of [their] votes."

House Democrats have their own version of Rendell's proposal that is closer to what the governor wants and "far superior" to the Senate bill, said Matthew Maciorkoski, spokesman for Rep. Camille "Bud" George, D-Clearfield, chairman of the House Environmental Resources & Energy Committee.

"We're not sure anybody knows at this point which has the best shot of reaching the governor," Maciorkoski said. "It could be the Senate version with changes insisted on by the House."

The only positive thing Rendell had to say about the Senate bill is that it constituted "action."

"The package doesn't go far enough to secure Pennsylvania's position as a leading state in alternative energy production," the governor said. "The bill approved by the Senate creates an investment fund of \$250 million. Not only is this far short of the \$850 million I proposed, it would make Pennsylvania's clean energy fund smaller than the \$300 million fund created by Rhode Island, a state with 9 percent of our population."

Rendell also opposes a provision in the Senate bill that would earmark \$25 million for utilities to comply with laws that limit mercury pollution.

"It puts us in a position of paying the utility companies not to pollute. That's just not right. The law is the law and we all have to follow it," Rendell said.

Henderson said, "We're very disappointed the governor could not find anything complimentary to say about moving a \$650 million bill out of the Senate."

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