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US House approves energy bill - but veto threatened

The US House of Representatives approved a sweeping energy bill December 6 that includes a national renewable portfolio standard and an extension of wind and solar tax incentives. But its fate looks uncertain as it makes its way to the Senate and to President Bush, who has threatened a veto.

The bill (H.R. 6) passed by a vote 235 to 181, under a strong push by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Democrat from California, who described it as 'the shot heard 'round the world for energy independence for America.'

The bill includes a requirement that 15% of the nation's power come from renewable energy and efficiency by 2020. But Republican critics of the bill, including Texas Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, vowed to fight the RPS, arguing it unfairly penalizes states without strong wind potential.

The RPS also is under attack by the White House, which warned the provision could evoke a presidential veto, if it makes it to the President's desk.

Meanwhile, the American Wind Energy Association and the Solar Energy Industries Association have redoubled their efforts to win public support.

For the wind industry, H.R. 6 extends a 2 cents/kWh production tax credit through December 2012. The credit will otherwise expire at the end of 2008. Solar wins an eight-year extension, through December 31, 2016, of its 30% investment tax credit for businesses. The bill also extends a similar 30% tax credit for residential solar, in this case until 2014, with a credit cap of US\$4000.

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