

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers and Rep. Diana DeGette in POLITICO: Senate Should Pass Hydropower Improvements

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As Congress faces tough questions about our fiscal future, we also have a unique opportunity to advance bipartisan energy policy that will create jobs. Putting Americans to work by expanding the nation's access to clean, affordable hydropower is a solution on which the House of Representatives already found consensus. Indeed, when we passed the Hydropower Regulatory Efficiency Act earlier this year, we acted unanimously — the only example of unanimity on an energy issue in this Congress. That is why we urge the Senate to take up and pass this hydropower legislation before the end of the year.

Hydropower has provided the U.S. with affordable, reliable, sustainable energy for over 130 years. Today, hydropower makes up two-thirds of the nation's renewable-electricity supply, and regions that get a majority of their electricity from hydropower have on average the lowest electricity bills in the nation. Hydropower's flexibility contributes to a more stable electric grid and enables integration of additional variable renewable resources.

The Department of Energy reports that more than 12 gigawatts of capacity could be installed at our nation's existing non-powered dams. That's the equivalent of 12 nuclear power plants. In fact, only 3 percent of the country's 80,000 dams currently have generation facilities. Many developers are also exploring smaller applications, including construction in engineered irrigation conduits.

The potential of hydropower to create jobs is also enormous. A 2010 study conducted by the National Hydropower Association revealed that by utilizing currently untapped resources, the U.S. could add approximately 60,000 megawatts of new hydropower by 2025, creating up to 700,000 jobs in the process. It is estimated that for every megawatt of new small hydropower installed at existing dams without hydropower, 5.3 jobs are created (including direct, indirect and induced jobs). With jobs still scarce for too many Americans, we should be looking at every opportunity to put Americans back to work.

All of these factors make clear that Congress should be working to increase Americans' access to hydropower. That is why we came together to collaborate on the HREA. It facilitates the development of small hydropower and conduit projects and studies the feasibility of a streamlined two-year permitting process for other low-impact development. With minimal authorizations that are completely offset, the bill adds no costs to taxpayers.

The unanimous passage of our bill in the House was a bright spot of bipartisan cooperation this year. Ten members of Congress from both parties joined us as sponsors of the bill. Both the National Hydropower Association, the trade association that promotes the development of our hydropower resources, and American Rivers, the largest advocacy group dedicated to protecting the health of our nation's waterways, testified in support of the legislation.

But since passage, the HREA has stalled in the Senate. Without immediate Senate action, the 113th Congress will have to spend additional time and resources to reintroduce and advance policy we've already reached agreement on — time that would be better spent focusing on other important energy-related issues. The time is now for the Senate to approve these hydropower regulatory improvements. We must not pass up this opportunity for bipartisan energy legislation when the finish line is in sight.

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