

## Lawmakers at loggerheads over Trump plan

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House Energy and Commerce Chairman Greg Walden (R-Ore.) during a subcommittee hearing on energy infrastructure yesterday. Energy and Commerce Committee

A House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing yesterday served as a battleground as Democrats and Republicans sparred over President Trump's infrastructure plan, but at least one member appeared open to crossing over enemy lines for compromise.

The president's \$200 billion proposal suggests sweeping changes to the National Environmental Policy Act and other permitting rules, including for energy projects, and aims to leverage private investment ([Greenwire](#), Feb. 12).

The general line from Republicans is that it's a strong starting point, while many Democrats say the White House framework is not well thought out and won't be effective.

Chairman Greg Walden (R-Ore.) said that while there are difficult details to work out, he thinks there is "support for a broad infrastructure bill."

"We're thinking outside the box to see where we can make the most progress with limited federal funds. We're focused on fixing the regulatory environment, encouraging public-private partnerships and strengthening our workforce," Walden said.

But his Democratic counterpart, Rep. Frank Pallone of New Jersey, called the plan a "bait-and-switch" that does not offer any new funding and won't boost the economy.

"Calling the Trump plan worthless isn't partisan, it's the reality," Pallone said.

Another Democratic member of the panel seemed to strike a tone of compromise on the permitting provisions, which most liberals have panned.

"We hear all the time from businesses and investors that the regulatory system can cause uncertainty and a lengthy delay can cause projects not to get built or be more expensive or result in investors not wanting to take risks," said Rep. Scott Peters (D-Calif.), who has been a strong supporter of hydropower in particular.

"I don't think we do ourselves any favors on this side of the aisle by not thinking about what we can do" to fix that problem, he said.

Representatives from several energy sectors, including electricity and hydropower, pitched the committee on supporting their industries during the process.

"To support and protect the 21st-century economy, we need a stronger, more regionally integrated transmission grid," said Brian Slocum, vice president for operations at ITC Holdings Corp., the largest independent transmission company in the country.

"Investing in this grid now will help protect the resilience of our electric system and economy, and allow us to take advantage of resource diversity across the nation," he said, "all while keeping electricity prices low for consumers and businesses."

Texas Republican Rep. Joe Barton said that he hopes the infrastructure plan focuses on letting the private sector take the lead.

"I think you could argue that if you look at public-sector infrastructure like highways and bridges ... compared to private-sector infrastructure like pipelines, refineries, transmission lines, the private sector is doing a better job," Barton said.

"I think it's important to look at permitting reforms and things like that, but if it's not broke, don't fix it."

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