

Reid abandons oil-spill, energy legislation until September

By Darren Goode and Ben Geman - 08/03/10 01:59 PM ET

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) has yanked consideration of legislation responding to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill for the summer without floor debate or votes this week.

"It's a sad day when you can't find a handful of Republicans to support a bill" that holds BP accountable and creates green jobs, Reid told reporters in announcing a delay at least until at least September.

Reid had planned to debate and vote on competing Democratic and Republican spill plans Wednesday but he said "it's clear Republicans were going to be determined to stand in the way of everything."

Reid promised that, "in the interim, we will continue to work for Republican votes."

"We are going to continue to listen to people during the August recess," Reid said, "and we are going to continue fighting for energy legislation before we leave this Congress."

He said it will be easier to do so after the summer break "because we've had some very good conversations."

"I think before the end of the year, the answer is absolutely yes" that energy legislation will be passed.

Robert Dillon, spokesman for Senate Energy and Natural Resources ranking member Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), pointed out that Reid did not even have all the members of the Democratic caucus standing behind his effort - and that was the reason he had to pull it.

"The reason Sen. Reid pulled the bill is because his own members were set to vote against it and for the Republican bill," Dillon noted in an email. "We believe our bill is better and less costly. Instead of playing the blame game, Democratic leaders should allow an open and transparent process where both sides can contribute ideas."

The decision to abandon the legislation comes amid concerns among some Democrats that the energy provisions — which focus on home efficiency retrofits and natural gas-powered and electric vehicles — were too modest.

"I think there was substantial concern on the Democratic side that the energy bill did not do enough," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.).

She said some feel "very strongly" that there needs to be a renewable electricity standard.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) said waiting gives lawmakers a chance to gain traction for adding a national renewable electricity standard, which would require utilities to provide escalating amounts of power from sources like wind and solar energy.

"I thought as I was listening to the discussion, 'Mmm, this could be good. Maybe we can beef [the bill] up a little to be more meaningful,'" she said.

Sen. Mark Udall (D-Colo.) also said the delay would give advocates of a renewable electricity standard a chance to win support for adding it to the bill.

Senate Democratic leaders had proposed a strategy to address the Gulf spill and future spills that does away with liability limits for producers. Unlike a Republican alternative, the Democratic strategy does not try to scale

back the administration's temporary offshore drilling ban or quicken revenue sharing for coastal-producing states.

Reid on Monday said he and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) were trying to reach an agreement allowing for votes on the Democratic plan and the Republican alternative this week.