

LEGISLATION

US Permitting Reform Closer Than Ever, Top LNG Lobbyist Says

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Congress is increasingly likely to pass a permitting reform bill this fall aimed at expediting approvals of gas, LNG and clean energy projects, a top industry lobbyist tells Energy Intelligence.

The prediction came a day after President Donald Trump's continued assault on offshore wind gave Congressional negotiators fodder to push permitting reform through, despite concerns from some Democrats over rolling back federal protections and environmental reviews.

"I think that this is as close as we've been to getting this done," Charlie Riedl, executive director of the Washington-based Center for LNG, said Wednesday on the sidelines of the Gulf Coast Energy Forum this week.

"We've been talking to a lot of the Blue Dog [Democrat] coalition folks that tend to be more toward the moderate middle" in a "concerted and meaningful effort to get it done."

Speaking on a forum panel, Riedl said reform legislation has "maybe a 50% chance, which in DC is pretty resolute. We've been doing a lot of meetings on the Hill. ... They're taking the meetings. They're listening."

The Senate Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026 would shorten time frames for environmental reviews and restrict eligibility for lawsuits under federal air and wildlife protections that have frequently held up energy projects. It would also seek to provide political continuity by putting firmer guardrails on agency project reviews.

Trump Tosses a Wrench

Earlier in the week, the Trump administration filed a legal challenge to a Connecticut offshore wind project that is already generating power and nearing completion. The move has the potential to derail the bipartisan reform deal, with text already unveiled but a final vote delayed until the post-election lame-duck session.

Opposition from environmental groups had already put the legislation on shaky ground, and there is a risk some House Democrats could hold out in hopes of negotiating a better deal if their party takes control of the lower chamber next year. That could scuttle the effort entirely, since Trump would still hold the White House and any overhaul of the legislation would require 60 votes in the Senate.

These latest developments also put Democratic lawmakers who support both wind power and permitting reform in a tough spot.

"Frankly, we need to get permitting certainty in law, and this proves it," Democratic Senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Martin Heinrich, lead permitting reform negotiators, said in a joint statement. "In the meantime, the administration needs to start showing good faith progress on wind permits."

Xan Fishman, vice president of energy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, told Energy Intelligence that it would be "really helpful" if the administration stopped targeting energy technologies to help secure a bipartisan permitting deal. But he said the legislation would also "restrain this administration or any future administration" from taking similar actions.

'Something for Everybody'

Despite little progress in federal reviews of wind and solar permit applications, permitting reform has continued to advance.

"There's something in it for everybody," Riedl maintained, saying he considers the legislation a detente of sorts between renewable energy and natural gas proponents.

The bill is already on the Senate committee agenda for the first week of the lame-duck session, so a vote is expected regardless of what happens in the election. "It's the first item on the calendar," Riedl said.

It also will likely have to go the House for a floor vote, with Senate staff working currently on technical amendments to address lawmakers' various concerns.

Riedl, like many in the gas industry, is particularly interested in what legal reforms end up in the final version.

"If this legislation gets passed, it will significantly limit the sort of what I would call frivolous lawsuits that we've been fighting for as long as I've been doing this," Riedl told the forum. But he acknowledged to Energy Intelligence that "there will always be another angle that the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] will continue to work."

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