



WASHINGTON, D.C., MARCH 25, 2009—Congressman Rick Boucher (D-VA) joined the Franklin Center for its 2009 “Benevolus Series” policy discussions on Capitol Hill. Mr. Boucher, Co-Chairman of the Franklin Center, is in his fourteenth term and is a Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, serving both as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and Internet and as a member of the Energy and Environment Subcommittee. He also sits on the House Judiciary Committee, serving on Subcommittee on Courts and Competition Policy.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee is arguably the busiest in Congress this year, since President Obama’s top two domestic policy priorities -- climate change and health care reform – fall under the Committee’s jurisdiction. The Congressman is also occupied with various telecommunications issues, including the digital television transition which has attracted its share of controversy.

But the topic of the day was climate change.

Mr. Boucher, a leader amongst centrist Democrats who want to ensure that climate change legislation is not “economically disruptive”, discussed the prospect for legislative action in the House. He said Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA) wanted to move legislation out of Committee by the Memorial Day district work period. Mr. Boucher felt this was an ambitious but feasible scenario, calling the process “encouraging.” He later predicted the House would pass climate legislation “sometime this summer.”

Two of the main flashpoints in the debate, he said, would be in the areas of renewable portfolio standards (RPS), and how emissions credits would be distributed. The Congressman spent most of his time outlining the landscape for the emissions credits.

He indicated that “some measure” of credit auctions for certain sectors would be part of the overall legislation, mentioning the mobile sector as one. He also stressed that the auctions would have to be structured to guard against windfall profits and utilities passing on costs of credits to customers. Crafting these policies carefully, he said, was critical to ensuring that the legislation contained economic balance. Moreover, he was confident that there were enough like-minded Democrats in the House of Representatives to bring about these important outcomes.

In response to a question about activity from the Obama Administration, Mr. Boucher said he viewed the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) recent endangerment finding as “lighting a fire” under the Congress. He was also personally impressed by President Obama’s detailed answers on the carbon pricing during a prime-time news conference the President held earlier in the week. Mr. Boucher said that for the President to display such a grasp of the minutiae of a complicated subject was proof that Mr. Obama was personally vested in the policy debate, which he viewed as a very positive.

Turning to his Judiciary Committee duties, Rep. Boucher said he was working on a privacy bill in the area of advertising with the goal of increasing electronic commerce. If consumers are assured that their privacy is protected on the Internet, he argued, they will be more comfortable conducting business online. One guiding principle of his legislative effort is that every consumer has a right to know what information is being collected about them.

In addition to the privacy legislation, Mr. Boucher said that his Judiciary Subcommittee would be addressing universal service of the internet, the Satellite Home Viewing Act, the Digital-Television transition, and the \$7.2 billion included in the economic stimulus package for broadband construction and deployment.