Environmental organizations link arms to protect Shaheen-Portman bill from poison pill amendments

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Contact your senators today and tell them to vote "NO" on any anti-LEED amendments and "YES" on Rhode Island Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse's amendment to S. 761, the Shaheen-Portman Energy Savings and Industrial Competitiveness Act.

The Shaheen-Portman bill could be a real victory. Beyond being a bill that might actually pass in this Congress, it holds promise to better our energy security, save money for taxpayers and businesses and encourage private-sector job creation. The bill contains a variety of policies and programs to reduce residential, commercial and industrial energy use. That's why so many groups joined in to advertise their support for it.

At the same time, however, many of these supportive groups are fighting off anti-environmental amendments that would distort the bill's original, and I dare say noble, intentions. There is a push to compromise the integrity of this bill by rolling back the progress the federal government has made as a leader in green building. Those organizations that banned together to support the bill now have to stand together to keep the bill free of these poison-pill, narrow interest amendments.

Despite the outcry from the building and environmental communities, an anti-LEED amendment is still reportedly in the works. Ten major environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Defense Fund, sent a letter to the members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee today in reference to Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu's rumored contribution, stating that they "strongly oppose any such amendment or any other veiled attempt to restrict the use of LEED or recognize a weaker rating system dominated by few industries as equivalent, and urge you do the same." In case you were wondering, big chemical is pushing this amendment.

Eleven major environmental and building groups, including the National Wildlife Federation, the American Institute of Architects and USGBC, also sent a letter yesterday in reference to an amendment to Shaheen-Portman from Sens. John Hoeven and Joe Manchin that would repeal a key provision of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, Section 433, which sets carbon pollution reduction targets for new federal buildings. Instead, the letter urges Senate support for a compromise amendment from Whitehouse, which would make some common sense, widely supported improvements to the 2007 law to make it work better, but would not repeal it.

These groups are standing together to fight off dirty politics and keep this bill something that the Senate can be proud of. Congress has a chance to do something truly beneficial and demonstrate leadership to address the huge energy challenges at hand. It's a chance for them to choose the people, their taxpayer dollars and the environment over lobbyist-driven intervention. We'll see if this bill is an actual victory, or just another bullied blunder. You can help.

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