

MIRS Capitol Capsule

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Energy Debate Dominates Senate GOP Caucus

"Energy" was the watchword of the day in hours of Senate Republican caucuses. Though budgets were on senators' minds, the energy package dominated the closed-door meetings as the chamber mulls action before summer break.

Energy company lobbyists from both the incumbents and the competitive suppliers were turning up the heat on legislators in an already muggy building today. Sources also tell *MIRS* Gov. Jennifer [GRANHOLM](#) also has been engaged on the issue, as well.

The package in question creates a \$60 million energy efficiency program, benchmarks the amount of energy used in Michigan that must come from alternative sources like wind turbines and rolls back the state's customer choice law.

The bills moved from the Energy Policy Committee on June 12, in part due to Sen. Bruce [PATTERSON](#)'s (R-Canton) discontent with his own caucus' leadership, but now that the ball's rolling, it's stayed in motion (See "[Patterson Moves House Energy Bills](#)," 6/12/08).

Some of the more conservative caucus members would like to stop the inertia. A source tells *MIRS* that some senators remain unconvinced that the Legislature must act on energy at all, since electrical generation, in the short-term, isn't a problem.

But Sen. Cameron [BROWN](#) (R-Fawn River Twp.) said substitutes are being drafted with his ideas and those of the two other committee members who voted no on the bills, Sens. Patty [BIRKHOLZ](#) (R-Saugatuck) and Wayne [KUIPERS](#) (R-Holland).

"I hope common sense prevails at the end of the day," Brown said.

Although the week is crowded with budgets, energy bills still could make it to the floor.

The most controversial part is Public Act 141 reform, which guarantees 90 percent of the energy market for incumbent utilities DTE and Consumers Energy. Brown said his sub will provide Consumers Energy and DTE with the "certainty they need in the marketplace" for new generation, without eliminating consumer choice.

As for renewable portfolio standards (RPS), Brown said there was "general agreement" there. The Senate panel moved out a mandate of 10 percent RPS by 2015.