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From: POLITICO Pro
Sent: Wed 6/14/2017 6:22:39 PM
Subject: Ethanol politics bog down E15 bill

By Eric Wolff

06/14/2017 02:18 PM EDT

A bill to expand sales of gasoline with 15 percent ethanol appears to be stuck on long-running disputes over biofuel policy that may limit its support outside of corn states.

Sen. Tom Carper (Del.), the top Democrat on the Environment and Public Works Committee, said after a hearing today that he will oppose the E15 bill without an amendment addressing "transparency in the RIN market," a reference to the credits refiners must purchase to comply with the Renewable Fuels Standard. Merchant refiners in the Philadelphia area, along with Trump associate Carl Icahn and refining giant Valero, blame high RIN prices for threatening their profits.

Carper also raised concerns about increasing ozone emissions that already plague his state if more E15 were sold, a concern shared by several influential environmental groups. Sen. Tammy Duckworth (Ill.) is the bill's only Democratic co-sponsor on the committee.

Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) did not ask any questions at today's hearing, but afterward he told POLITICO he is in "negotiations" over the bill, declining to offer details. Sen. Deb Fischer (R-Neb.), the lead sponsor of the bill, said she plans to speak to Booker but has not done so yet.

Republicans in the hearing seemed to have staked out their positions, with corn-state senators like Mike Rounds (S.D.), Jerry Moran (Kan.), and Joni Ernst (Iowa) promoting the bill and long-time RFS opponents like Sen. Jim Inhofe (Okla.) and Chairman John Barrasso (Wyo.) criticizing it.

WHAT'S NEXT: Barrasso has said the committee will vote on the E15 bill, but no date has been set.

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