Senate Advances Energy Bill as Power-Cost Fight Intensifies

E

Erin Calloway

Updated Nov 16, 2026

A 73-25 Senate vote has opened debate on an energy bill aimed at speeding construction as power-hungry data centers strain the grid. The proposal also seeks to make those facilities cover more of their costs - but critics warn that faster approvals could come at the expense of communities and environmental protections.

The November 9 vote was a first step, not final passage. Senators still must settle disputes over the bill before it can go to the House.

Electricity bills drive the push

The legislation would speed approvals for power plants, transmission lines, mines and other major projects. Backers argue that lengthy reviews are holding up infrastructure needed to meet growing electricity demand.

Data centers have become a major part of that argument. These facilities house servers used for AI and other computing services, and their demand can require new generation and grid upgrades.

According to Reuters, the bill would require large data centers to pay more of the costs of upgrades needed to serve them. That addresses a concern among households: whether investments made for large corporate customers will help push up everyone else’s bills.

Democratic Sens. Martin Heinrich and Sheldon Whitehouse negotiated the package with Republican Sens. Shelley Moore Capito and Mike Lee. Clean-energy developers, oil and gas companies and labor groups have supported the broader effort.

Communities want a say in what gets built

The opposition is not simply a dispute over whether the country needs more electricity. Environmental and tribal groups object to how the bill would change the approval process and limit challenges to projects.

Associated Press reporting identifies concerns about judicial review, the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act. Critics say the changes could weaken scrutiny of effects on air, water, wildlife and nearby communities.

The National Congress of American Indians urged lawmakers to stop consideration, citing tribal sovereignty and sacred sites. Nevada Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto supported opening debate but said she would oppose final passage unless provisions affecting historic-preservation law were removed, Reuters reported.

Sponsors responded with amendments requiring consultation with tribes, expanding states' role in transmission planning and establishing assistance for communities dealing with data-center impacts. Heinrich said those changes strengthened protections, although opponents said important risks remained. Reuters also described a new Department of Energy program offering assistance to communities dealing with data-center impacts, an issue that reaches beyond the construction permits themselves.

Trump's wind opposition complicates the deal

Trump supports faster development and urged the Senate to move the legislation forward. But his opposition to offshore wind introduces a conflict inside a package covering both fossil fuels and clean energy.

AP reported that the administration has spent nearly $4 billion paying companies to walk away from offshore wind projects. Whitehouse said a provision in the bill would end those buyouts.

Trump said November 9 that the legislation was not fully negotiated and reiterated his opposition to wind turbines. Maryland Sen. Chris Van Hollen voted against advancing the package, saying it did not adequately address efforts to block an offshore wind project in his state.

That disagreement leaves senators negotiating not just the speed of construction, but which energy sources the administration will allow to move ahead.

Pass a deal now or wait for January?

Democrats' midterm victories have created another split. Some want to use their stronger position in the next Congress to pursue a different package. Others argue that this bill provides a foundation they can build on later.

Whitehouse described it as "the floor, not the ceiling" of Democrats' environmental ambitions. Opponents counter that passing a sweeping measure in the closing weeks of the current Congress could lock in concessions they will regret.

The 73-25 tally shows broad support for beginning that argument, not agreement on the finished law. Amendments and final Senate passage remain ahead, and the House would have to approve a bill before it could reach the president.