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## **Dems Highlight Energy, Baucus To Create Energy Subpanel**

Senate Democrats intend to focus more attention and resources on energy issues this year, with efforts under way to create two subcommittees on the issue. **Senate Finance Chairman Baucus** today said he intends to create an energy subcommittee this year to find energy solutions within the tax code. "I'm pretty sure I will," said Baucus, adding that the new subcommittee would "supplement and complement" energy-related work in the Energy and Natural Resources and Agriculture panels. **Senate Agriculture Chairman Harkin** also said he is contemplating an energy subcommittee. The two chairmen, along with other Democratic senators, said energy issues would drive the Democratic-led Congress this year. "The subject of energy is fast becoming the No. 1 issue for both parties. It may take more than one subcommittee [to focus on the issue]," said Sen. **Mary Landrieu**, D-La., who has led on energy issues for Democrats. "Some fixes may be in the tax code. Some may be within the Agriculture Committee ... and then the Energy Committee." Democrats, including **Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Bingaman**, did not express concerns with jurisdictional issues. "The more the merrier," Baucus said.

Democrats talked about the new energy focus along with other issues while holding a leadership retreat behind closed doors at the Library of Congress this morning. The entire Caucus met to discuss committee and floor process as well as issues. "It went really well," **Majority Leader Reid** said. Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Chairman **Charles Schumer** of New York, Steering Committee Chairwoman **Debbie Stabenow** of Michigan and Democratic Policy Committee Chairman **Byron Dorgan** of North Dakota gave presentations about their strategies for the next two years. Former Majority Leader George Mitchell, D-Maine, spoke about the importance and challenges of taking a bipartisan approach, and Democrats were slated to hear from former President Clinton over lunch.

In their own separate Library of Congress retreat, Republicans also talked about bipartisanship, although some appeared to be withholding judgment until they see how Democrats run the chamber. "We are here to cooperate. We believe it's time for the Senate to act on a number of issues proposed by the new majority," said **Minority Leader McConnell**. He said Republicans expect to support the Democratic ethics package next week, and also the minimum wage increase, to which Reid has agreed to attach small business tax relief provisions. But Republican Conference Chairman **Jon Kyl** of Arizona warned that Republicans will not always cooperate with Democrats on legislation down the line. "For the time being, we want to support our leaders to bring comity to the Senate," he said.

Minority Whip Lott said the Democratic talk of a bipartisan approach was a practical one in the nearly evenly divided Senate "because neither party is going to be able to do anything without the other." Sen. **Saxby Chambliss**, R-Ga., added: "I don't think anyone comes to the Senate who does not want to be bipartisan. The question is the practicality of how it works. We will have to wait and see." Among the issues Republicans discussed at their retreat were the war in Iraq, the budget, appropriations earmarks, stem-cell research "and a variety of other substantive matters," said Sen. **Arlen Specter**, R-Pa. Sen. **Mel Martinez**, R-Fla., said: "We need to stay positive. It

doesn't have to be a zero-sum game." But Republicans stressed they would strongly resist any Democratic attempt to squelch their participation in the legislative process. "We have to make sure that we get serious consideration of our points of view," said Sen. **Ted Stevens**, R-Alaska.

-- *by Greta Wodele and Terry Kivlan*