

**Stevens would create new climate change, oceans subcommittees.**  
**Andrew Freedman, *E&E Daily* reporter**  
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Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) is proposing to create two new subcommittees for the 109th Congress to directly address climate change and oceans policy.

If established, the climate change subcommittee would be the only such body solely focused on the contentious subject in Congress. Its creation would signal a shift in the way the committee treats the issue compared to the 108th Congress, when former Chairman Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) used the full committee platform to hold seven hearings on climate change and push his effort to establish a cap-and-trade system to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A Commerce Committee staff member said the reorganization would allow the full committee to focus on other issues -- such as the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act -- while giving climate change and oceans the attention they deserve at the subcommittee level.

"I don't think he sees [climate change] as something he is going to do at the full committee," said a committee staff member. "It signals that he wants it singled out for attention."

McCain's hearings were criticized for ignoring some in the scientific community who disagree with the view that human emissions are the main driver behind recent warming trends. In an interview with the Alaskan press last week, Stevens indicated he is still unsure whether there is such a link and pledged to hold hearings "where there's some balance with regard to the information that Congress receives."

Stevens also argued that research has shown "it is clearly not the actions of mankind that have brought about the changes that we're seeing."

At the same time, Stevens admitted climate change has become increasingly problematic in his home state, where permafrost is melting and a wide range of ecological changes are taking place. "We have to devise some way to deal with Alaska's problems," he said.

McCain plans to continue to push for his bill and could seek to serve on the subcommittee. A spokesperson could not be reached before deadline to comment, but last week McCain brushed off a question when asked if his no longer being chairman of the panel would hinder his chances to raise the issue. "The issue is not going away," McCain said. "It's much bigger than the Commerce Committee."

In addition to the climate change panel, Stevens said he will push to revive the National Ocean Policy Study, a group that was created in 1974 to help implement the recommendations of the Stratton Commission that studied ocean policy. NOPS disbanded in 1994 during a wave of congressional budget cuts following the Republican takeover of Congress.

A committee aide said a new NOPS would provide a forum on ocean issues and may focus on translating the 212 recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy into legislative proposals. There is already a subcommittee with jurisdiction over oceans chaired by Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), and it is unclear how the new subcommittee would differ in scope and whether any authority would be stripped from Snowe's panel.

"I think having a strong focus on ocean policy is important, and if this approach can lead to that, then it's a good idea," said Sarah Chasis, director of the Water and Coast Program for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "I guess it gives an opportunity to reach across to other committees," she said.

The subcommittee proposals have to be ratified by the committee, and committee staff members said it is unclear how much support they now have. Stevens has also talked of adding a tenth subcommittee but has not given details on that.

Because of the uncertainty, there are no front-runners to chair either panel, although Sen. John Sununu (R-N.H.) was mentioned as a possible candidate for the climate change subcommittee. "I don't know who is going to be subcommittee chairman, and we may have some differences, we'll have to wait and see," Stevens said.

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