

✘The [Huffington Post](#) reports that Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi is seeking a single, comprehensive energy bill that establishes a strategy for deriving energy independence and fighting climate change. She is quoted as saying “I would like to see one bill, which is the energy bill, with the cap and trade and the grid piece.”

Her desire for a unified approach to energy and climate is understandable. After all, it is the way we use energy that has led to most of the human contribution to carbon in the atmosphere. In addition, it is hard to deny that if there is a national energy policy, it consists of a series of not-always-consistent initiatives. The vision is that a comprehensive energy package can deliver a unified approach to our energy and environmental challenges.

Congress has taken this tack several times before, passing complex energy policy bills in 1978, 1992, 2005, and 2007. But stuffing everything into a single bill has not always produced a consistent set of policies, and making all of the policy ideas live or die together has not always helped in getting legislation through Congress. It took several years, for instance, to pass what ultimately became the Energy Policy Act of 2005. In earlier versions, Democrats refused to support a bill allowing for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Republicans refused to support a bill creating a national renewable portfolio standard, and neither side wanted a bill that didn't contain its pet policies. Toss in a disagreement about how to extend tax incentives for renewable energy development, and you have a formula for tying up Congress for quite a while.

While considering energy and climate initiatives as an ensemble could allow for a more intelligent discussion of our policies options, it also might lead to “least common denominator” lawmaking — in order to keep enough people on board, controversial ideas may need to be set aside. It will take firm hands in Congress and eloquent leadership from the White House to make sure that a comprehensive new energy bill remains thoughtful, internally consistent, and bold.