As Cara posted yesterday, California State Senator Fran Pavley and Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA) hosted a joint Climate Change forum today at UCLA. As predicted, protesters gathered outside the event but the anti-cap and trade crowd was quite small. Here are photos showing a few protesters:





In contrast to the small number of Waxman opponents, a larger crowd turned out to support a public option for health care. Here's a photo of the public option crowd:



The forum provided an interesting and compelling overview of the climate problem. Professor Stephen Schneider of Stanford provided the science background; Retired U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Dennis McGinn offered his thoughts on the national security implications of climate change; Bob Epstein, the Vice Chair of the AB 32 Economic and Technology Advancement Advisory Committee, addressed the economic consequences of climate policy; Anthony Eggert of the California Air Resources Board provided detail about the implementation of AB 32; I provided an overview of AB 32 and the Waxman-Markey bill (H.R. 2454) and Congressman Waxman concluded with remarks about the politics of climate change and his thoughts about H.R. 2454.

Not surprisingly, audience questions were largely directed at Congressman Waxman and centered on the likelihood of Senate passage this year. Again not surprisingly Waxman stated strongly that he "wants a bill signed before President Obama goes to Copenhagen." More interestingly, he also made several comments about how one of his principal aims is "to get something in place and to get going now." Even though he would have liked a "more aggressive approach, " he acknowledged political realities. The implication was that at this point, something is better than nothing and passage of legislation will allow us to establish the apparatus necessary to regulate emissiosn more stringently in the future. Passage is also important, he argued, to produce the rules necessary for the regulated community to have some certainty in order to plan for long term investments.

Waxman also said that the substance of whatever the Senate passes is less important than actually getting something passed since a conference committee

will then negotiate differences between the Senate and House versions. As he apparently told a Senator who asked him what he wanted to have included or excluded from the House version of the bill, “just get a bill passed, get it to conference.”

I remain skeptical that Congress will pass H.R. 2454 this year but then again, as Waxman noted, many people never thought the bill would pass the House of Representatives. I hope I’m wrong.