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Congress

approves gas bill

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Congressional backers of President Carter's emergency natural gas legislation hoped to get it to the White House before his "fireside chat" to the nation tonight.

The House and Senate disagreed over price controls Tuesday and sent their differing versions of the bill to a conference committee. The conferees met late Tuesday before a flickering fire in the fireplace of a crowded Capitol room, and reached agreement in 10 minutes.

It opened the way for Senate and House consideration of the compromise today, a week after Carter sent his proposal to Capitol Hill.

"What we're doing is reaching agreement in time for the fireside chat," said Senate Republican leader Howard Baker. Baker was not a conferee but was in on several consultations about the bill earlier Tuesday.

The bill does two main things:

—It allows pipelines operating across state lines to buy gas wherever they can during the emergency, bidding prices above the federal controls if necessary. The prices would still be subject to Carter's approval, and the emergency sales authority would expire Aug. 1.

—It lets the President order one interstate pipeline to share its supply with another, to protect homes, small businesses, hospitals and other top-priority gas users. This authority would end in April, or whenever Carter declares the natural gas emergency has passed.

The House passed the bill Tuesday afternoon, 367 to 52, or 87 more votes than needed for passage under the emergency conditions by which the bill was considered. It added a price limit of approximately \$2.02 per thousand cubic feet on the emergency sales.

When the bill got to the Senate, Sen. Adlai Stevenson, D-Ill., chief sponsor, said he could not accept the price limits because they "could be too low to enable producers to sell to interstate buyers." That would mean little or no gas could come out of the emergency provisions, he said.