



Monday, January 4, 2010

What's Next In The Senate?

What are the chances that the Senate will pass climate change legislation in 2010?

In December, the political calculations for controlling greenhouse gases dramatically changed.

- The Copenhagen climate change agreement signed by world leaders was weaker than many politicians were seeking.
- Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.; Joe Lieberman, I/D-Conn; and John Kerry, D-Mass., unveiled the outlines for a new climate bill that's less ambitious than the measure passed by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. The lawmakers were vague about when they would introduce the bill.
- Moderate Democrats in the Senate raised red flags on measures to curb carbon pollution through a cap-and-trade program.
- Republicans in the House and Senate announced plans to seek a congressional veto that would stop the EPA from regulating greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act.

What's next for Senate efforts to curb greenhouse gases?

-- *Margaret Kriz Hobson, NationalJournal.com*



4 Responses



Responded on January 4, 2010 3:16 PM

It Can Be Done

[Gene Karpinski](#)

President, League of Conservation Voters

“Momentum towards comprehensive clean energy and climate legislation continues to build.”

The breathlessness with which some beltway pundits have rushed to pronounce a climate bill dead is hardly newsworthy. Since before the House Energy & Commerce Committee began debating the American Clean Energy & Security Act, naysayers have predicted the demise of global warming legislation. And there's little doubt that more stories will get published and posted online before the Senate takes action.

The fact is that no one has ever claimed passing comprehensive clean energy and climate legislation would be easy. After all, corporate polluters and other powerful special interests have billions in corporate profits at stake, which is why they've launched an unprecedented misinformation campaign to block energy reform. But after a decade of dead-end energy policies, doing nothing is not an option in 2010.

Make no mistake, momentum towards comprehensive clean energy and climate legislation continues to build. Based on all that has been accomplished in the past year, we're very optimistic about its chances this year. The American Clean Energy and Security (ACES) Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives last June with bipartisan support, marking the first time a mandatory cap on greenhouse gas emissions standard has passed either chamber of Congress. The Senate process of drafting a climate and energy bill is currently underway, lead by a tripartisan team of Senators John Kerry, Lindsey Graham, and Joe Lieberman. The White House has committed to be actively involved in these legislative discussions and most recently exhibited leadership on a global stage in Copenhagen as nations worked towards an international climate agreement. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid concluded that the outcome of the Copenhagen climate talks in December would add further momentum to Senate progress, stating that the "developments strengthen our resolve to pass comprehensive clean energy legislation this spring that creates jobs, reduces pollution and improves our energy independence."

Recent polling proves there is strong voter support for concrete legislation that creates jobs, reduces carbon pollution and increases energy independence. In a recent Washington Post poll, nearly two-thirds of those polled think the federal government should regulate the release of greenhouse gases from sources like power plants, cars and factories in an effort to reduce global warming. And a nationwide CNN poll showed that six in ten Americans support a "cap and trade" proposal to cut pollution.

A new year doesn't necessarily bring new concerns. Americans continue to worry about jobs and the state of the economy. But 2010 does bring new opportunities to take back control of our economy, our security, and the future of our planet. It can be done. By passing comprehensive clean energy and climate legislation we can transition our nation to a new economy that will create jobs, improve our national security and international competitiveness, and protect the planet for future generations.



Responded on January 4, 2010 9:52 AM

Carbon Tax More Likely

[Robert J. Shapiro](#)

Chairman and Founder, Sonecon, U.S. Climate Task Force

"If cap-and-trade can't attract the votes, that suggests we'll hear more this year about a revenue-neutral, carbon-based tax."

The landscape for Senate discussion and eventual action on the climate is changing in important ways that are likely to expand the terms of public debate. The first critical shift is the grudging recognition in the White House and across the Senate that cap-and-trade has no better prospect of securing 60 votes this year than it has in the past, when it's failed to come anywhere close. The second crucial change is new pressures building to pass something to preempt direct EPA regulation. The recent EPA endangerment finding opened a new front in the battle over the climate, one set to expand later this year under a series of upcoming regulations in other areas that could set the terms for comprehensive EPA regulation of greenhouse gases. GOP proposals to block EPA direct regulation are rhetorical exercises at best, with less chance of ever passing the Senate than cap-and-trade -- much less also passing the House and then avoiding a presidential veto. Not only was the EPA finding effectively mandated by a recent Supreme Court ruling on the Clean Air Act; the credible prospect of direct regulation is already recognized as the only threat powerful enough and credible enough to move climate-phobic politicians and companies to seriously consider a better approach. And if cap-and-trade can't attract the votes, that

suggests we'll hear more this year about a revenue-neutral, carbon-based tax. Two early signs are a new proposal from Maria Cantwell that's a hybrid of a carbon tax and cap-and-trade, and recent favorable comments from Jeff Bingaman, the chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Tennessee Republican Senator Bob Corker. Carbon taxes are also an approach that's sharply cut emissions in Scandinavia, one that the EU is actively exploring following the disappointments of its cap-and-trade-based European Trading Scheme, and it's even the plan that Al Gore has long favored. A real public discussion and debate about a carbon tax, tied to offsetting cuts in payroll or other taxes, could be the best news for the climate in a very long time.



Responded on January 4, 2010 7:33 AM

Struggling Economy Will Dominate

[William O'Keefe](#)

CEO, George C. Marshall Institute

“ Cap and trade in any form is simply the worst way to deal with greenhouse gas emissions.”

The prospects for getting 60 votes for cap and trade legislation were never bright. Now, the unseemly spectacle of vote buying that was needed to produce 60 votes for health care legislation makes those prospects dimmer. Moderate Senators have no doubt been feeling the full heat of public anger over what it sees as out of control politics. Going forward, those moderate senators may follow the counsel of the late Senator Dirksen who once said that he saw the light when he felt the heat.

Public support for cap and trade was fading before the health care vote. Now like the horizon it will recede further when the Senate returns from its Christmas recess, especially as the nation experiences a very cold winter.

The economy continues to struggle and it is less than certain that a recovery is underway. If it is, it is a weak one. Poll after poll makes clear that the public's highest priorities are economic growth and job creation. Senators, especially those who want to return to the Senate next year, ought to focus on actions that will bring down unemployment and breathe life into the economy. Given the Senate's behavior last year, that might represent a triumph of hope over experience.

Cap and trade would impose hundreds of billions of dollars of unnecessary costs on a weak economy, even if their effect was several years in the future. That would create greater economic uncertainty at a time when what is needed are incentives and a more certain environment for investment, job creation, and public spending.

As the Senate debates the various cap and trade proposals that are being floated, it will become ever more clear that the consequences will enrich traders and rent seeking businesses, further increase the heavy hand of regulation with the burdens and consequences of higher energy costs being borne by the public. Investments by energy intensive industries with good paying jobs will seek more friendly economic environments and that will mean fewer jobs created here. Cap and trade in any form is simply the worst way to deal with greenhouse gas emissions and that also will become ever more clear.

What should happen in 2010 is that the Senate should engage in a real and more robust debate about climate change—both the extent of human influence and cost-effective actions to address it.

There are a number of actions that Congress can take that would both help the economy and slow the growth of greenhouse gas emission independent of whether climate change is seen as a serious or trivial problem. Those include incentives for developing new energy technologies, exporting technologies to developing countries, investing in nuclear power, bringing to market the full potential of increased natural gas reserves, and for producing the domestic energy that is needed to meet the needs of a

growing population and a healthy economy.

Good energy and economic policy would be good climate policy.



Responded on January 4, 2010 7:32 AM

Simpler Is Better

[Bill Snape](#)

Senior Counsel, Center For Biological Diversity

“The Senate needs to back off 1000 page bills with cap and trade schemes that only Wall Street and wonks understand.”

As Thoreau said, "simplify, simplify." I am hopeful the Senate will act in 2010, but it needs to back off 1000 page bills with cap and trade schemes that only Wall Street and wonks understand. Building off the success of the Clean Air Act, the Senate should seek to create science-based greenhouse pollutant standards. The wild cards in the Senate are not Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Lindsey Graham (S-SC), who appear determined to lead the far right overreaching against EPA's sensible (and Supreme Court mandated) endangerment finding, but Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Susan Collins (R-ME) who have introduced a climate bill that, while imperfect and in need of improvement, is straight forward and a potential "game changer." The challenge, of course, is that so many insiders are so blindly bought into "cap and trade" that any deviation from this mantra will elicit howls of outrage. Whatever system Congress creates, however (and maybe it will be a slimmed down cap and trade, or maybe cap and dividend), absolutely must tangibly and fairly reduce harmful greenhouse pollutants. Anything else is a sham and the electorate will know it.

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