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## Senate Democrats May Pull Climate Bill

Week's Debate Has Been Contentious

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If this week's Senate debate on a proposed cap-and-trade system for greenhouse gases was supposed to be a dress rehearsal for climate legislation, things are not looking too good for opening night.

The week has been marked by parliamentary maneuvers and bitter accusations over divergent estimates of the bill's future costs. On Wednesday, a group of GOP senators asked that the clerk of the Senate read the entire 491-page bill aloud, an extremely rare request. That took more than 10 hours.

Although parliamentary maneuvers could still extend the debate into next week, Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (Nev.) faced the prospect of failure in a bid to end debate on amendments to the climate bill this morning. In that event, he was expected to seek withdrawal of the entire measure, to the relief of some Democrats from coal-producing or heavy industrial states.

"We are going to have Democrats voting to end debate on what they call the most important issue facing the planet and Republicans voting to continue debate on it," said Don Stewart, communications director for Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).



Sens. Joseph I. Lieberman, left, John W. Warner and Barbara Boxer talk on Capitol Hill before the news conference on climate change. (By Susan Walsh -- Associated Press)

Some Democrats were worried yesterday that the GOP might try to block withdrawal of the legislation to prolong a debate that many Democrats think no longer works to their political benefit. Republicans have pounced on the high price of gasoline and have stressed that the climate legislation, by introducing a price on carbon dioxide emissions, would further raise the price of gas along with that of all other fossil fuels.

James M. Inhofe (Okla.), the top Republican on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said in a statement, "Now Democrats are on record as supporting legislation that would significantly increase prices at the pump and in our homes."

Dozens of amendments will die along with the bill. Several sought to impose tariffs on developing countries, such as China, that do not price carbon dioxide emissions. McConnell sought

an amendment to allow the energy and transportation secretaries to suspend parts of the legislation if they believed it had raised gasoline prices.

Environmentalists said that by bringing the bill to the floor, Reid had at least gotten senators to focus on climate change for the first time in three years.

“They are now being forced to look at this: What is the United States going to do on the most important issue facing the planet?” said Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council. “You have to have something concrete to get people’s attention. This did it.”

Environmentalists said they plan a lobbying and advertising campaign in the months ahead aimed at recalcitrant legislators.

“We now have a clear picture of which senators are listening to oil companies instead of the public, and we intend to hold them accountable,” said Jeremy Symons of the National Wildlife Federation.

Some environmentalists said the current legislation, co-sponsored by Sens. Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.) and John W. Warner (R-Va.), is too weak, in any case. The bill aims to stabilize atmospheric carbon concentrations at 488 parts per million, rather than at 350 parts per million, which climate scientists such as NASA’s James E. Hansen see as necessary.

“Any bill that does not set us on track to reduce atmospheric carbon levels to 350 parts per million is wishful and dangerous thinking,” wrote Kierán Suckling, of the Center for Biological Diversity, in an e-mail. “We’re thankful the bill was introduced, but more thankful that it did not pass.”

GOP opponents, meanwhile, crowed at the prospect of the Democrats’ failure. House Minority Leader John A. Boehner (Ohio) sent a letter asking House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to hold a vote on climate legislation, even though House Democrats have yet to produce a companion bill.

Rep. Rick Boucher (D-Va.), who chairs the House subcommittee charged with

crafting that chamber’s climate bill, said in an interview that he was unable to produce one because he and Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman John D. Dingell (D-Mich.) wanted a bipartisan bill, but the panel’s top Republican, Joe Barton (Tex.), does not believe human activities contribute to global warming.

“We still want to do it this year, but as of the moment, we do not have the cooperation we need to produce a bipartisan bill,” Boucher said.

Both Sens. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.), the presumptive presidential nominees, have endorsed the cap-and-trade approach, though McCain has consistently emphasized the need for more nuclear power plants. Neither senator returned to Washington for this week’s debate and vote.