



## With Obama's Offshore Drilling Announcement, Fault Lines Drawn in Climate Change Battle

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by: Yana Kunichoff

In the wake of President Obama's announcement of his plans for large-scale offshore drilling, Sen. John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) is laying the groundwork for urgent climate change legislation - and the fault lines of the Senate climate debate are becoming clear.



(Photo: [Magnera](#))

Kerry, along with Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) and Joe Lieberman (I-Connecticut), is currently working on the unenviable task of constructing a climate bill that will have enough support to overcome a GOP filibuster, but also not alienate progressives and environmental groups. The main issues of contention are pollution permits, pre-emption, offshore drilling, natural gas versus coal and fees for oil companies.

President Obama's release of new national offshore oil-drilling plans Wednesday could jeopardize the votes of ten key Democratic senators from coastal states who have strongly opposed any plans to drill in American waters. Obama's plan would open vast expanses of water along the Atlantic coastline, the eastern Gulf of Mexico and the north coast of Alaska to oil and natural gas drilling and end a moratorium on oil exploration along the East Coast.

"Drilling off the Virginia coast would endanger many of New Jersey's beaches and vibrant coastal economies," said Frank Lautenberg (D-New Jersey) in a press release Wednesday. "Giving Big Oil more access to our nation's waters is really a Kill, Baby, Kill policy: it threatens to kill jobs, kill marine life and kill coastal economies that generate billions of dollars. Offshore drilling isn't the solution to our energy problems, and I will fight this policy and continue to push for 21st century clean energy solutions."

Along with Bill Nelson (D-Florida), Robert Menendez (D-New Jersey), Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-Rhode Island), Benjamin Cardin (D-Maryland), Barbara Mikulski (D-Maryland), Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon), Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) and Ted Kaufman (D-Delaware), Lautenberg was the signatory of a letter addressed to Kerry, Graham and Lieberman warning, "we cannot support legislation that will mitigate one risk only to put our coasts at great peril from another source."

However, according to Capitol Hill news blog The Hill, offshore drilling is one of the main reasons that Graham is helping to craft the bill. The final product is expected to allow state legislatures to opt-in or opt-out by affirming if they want drilling off their coasts.

Kerry, Lieberman and Grant also walk a fine line in the issue of pre-emption. Businesses in support of climate legislation want federal greenhouse gas laws to pre-empt actions by individual states to regulate carbon emissions from businesses as well as efforts by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to rein in CO<sub>2</sub> through the Clean Air Act.

However, many see such a concession to the energy industry as taking a step back in environmental protection.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-California) has strongly opposed cutting down California's tailpipe emissions standards, as a pre-emptive policy would do.

Sen. Bernard Sanders said, "preempting leading states would be a huge mistake." Instead, Sanders, who is on both the Energy and National Resources Committee and the Environment and Public Works Committee, said "we should definitely set a floor, not a ceiling."

Feinstein also recommended that heavy industry be exempted from the initial cap, supported the Waxman-Markey formula for electric utility permit giveaways, called for new offshore drilling to require state-level legislation and said, "the legislation's spending authorizations expire no later than ten years after enactment." The latter decision would signal a major change from the 40-year permit allocation formulas in previous legislation.

Five Democrats and six Republicans signed a letter to push the White House to hold a nuclear energy summit in the next three to four months to develop a 50-year strategy. "Safe nuclear power must play an increasingly important role in meeting our rising energy demand and ensuring cleaner air," they wrote.

William Snape, with the Center for Biological Diversity, said that pursuing nuclear energy did not make sense when there were safer alternatives like solar, wind and geothermal energy.

Both Snape and Sanders highlighted the fact that, as of now, there is no safe manner in which to dispose of nuclear waste.

In his letter addressed to Kerry, Sanders called for a reinvestment in sustainable energy and energy efficiency, new sustainable energy investments, setting a strong sustainable energy standard and for Congress to "ramp up energy efficiency."

Kerry, Graham and Lieberman have held meetings this week with representatives from Shell, BP America, ConocoPhillips and Edison Electric Institute. The Senate bill is expected to be introduced soon after Congress returns from its two-week recess.

According to Snape, what is missing from discussions about the climate change bill is any mention of the scientific standard "that we are seeking to achieve with climate change legislation and regulation." The current best available science says we need to reach a 350 part per million atmospheric standard, he said, so "why is that not on the table?"

"Compromise shouldn't mean 'give industry everything it wants,'" Snape continued. "Yet, that appears to be the direction we are heading toward."