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Senate climate bill may weaken EPA, Clean Air Act

From Green Right Now Reports

As a new climate and energy bill winds its way through the U.S. Senate, opponents and watchdog groups are voicing concerns that the proposed legislation could strip power away from the Environmental Protection Agency and individual states.

According to multiple reports, a draft in progress from Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) would call for greenhouse gas curbs across multiple economic sectors, with a target of reducing emissions 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050. Power plant emissions would be regulated in 2012, with other major industrial sources phased in starting in 2016.

The three met with industry leaders on March 17 to discuss features of the bill. Among the potentially controversial items: Restricting the EPA's powers to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act and curbing states' climate laws and regulations.

"It wasn't in our earlier bills, but in terms of getting this energy

independence, job-creating carbon pollution bill going, this gives the business community the predictability that they need. It's very important to them," Lieberman said.

Industries generally are eager to consolidate new climate rules under one federal program rather than deal with regulation on a case-by-case or state-by-state basis. Any weakening of the Clean Air Act, however, is likely to encounter stiff resistance from environmental groups.

Center for Biological Diversity Executive Director Kieran Suckling was quick to go on the attack.

"If correctly reported, the Kerry, Lieberman, Graham approach is unacceptable. It won't stop global warming, and by attacking the Clean Air Act, it will remove the only tool we currently have that can do so," he said in a statement released by the organization.

"Kerry, Lieberman, and Graham appear to be taking Congress to a new low in its long-term failure to rise to the challenge of stopping global warming."

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), chairwoman of the subcommittee



that oversees the EPA budget, also voiced skepticism about the proposed changes.

"I don't think it should pre-empt EPA from anything," she said.

Bill Becker, executive director of National Association of Clean Air Agencies (which represents state and local air pollution control agencies) added his concerns.

"Climate change is such a monumental problem that action at all levels — local, state and federal — is essential if we are serious about achieving our ultimate goals," he said. "Future climate legislation should build upon this successful partnership, not supplant it, and preserve the rights of state and local governments to take more stringent actions where needed."

Kerry later told reporters that a full draft should be ready by next week, but was unsure when it might be released.