

# Green groups divided over US climate bill stand off

**Campaigners call for urgent effort to save US climate bill, while some insist proposed legislation remains fundamentally flawed**

By DANNY BRADBURY

Environmental groups have delivered a mixed reaction to Senator Lindsey Graham's controversial decision to withdraw support for the proposed climate change bill he had been working on, with campaigners arguing over whether or not the bill should be saved.

Senator Graham effectively abandoned his support for the bill over the weekend following a row over Democrat Senate Leader Harry Reid's determination to push for an immigration bill ahead of the mid-term elections. The climate change bill, that he worked on with Senators John Kerry and Joe Lieberman, has now been postponed until the row can be resolved.

Many of the leading green groups called on the Senate to work to get Graham back on board as quickly as possible, arguing that the next few months represent the best chance of the US passing any form of climate change legislation.

The US Climate Action Partnership, which has lobbied for a climate bill on behalf of a coalition of green groups and big businesses including Ford, GE, GM, Shell and Siemens, issued a statement urging that Senate and the administration to move forward with the legislation.

"The US faces a critical moment that will determine whether we will be able to unleash billions in energy investments or remain mired in the economic status quo," the group said. "The US Climate Action Partnership urges the US Senate and this Administration to make comprehensive climate and energy legislation a top priority this year."

The demand for action was echoed by Frances Beinecke, president of the New York branch of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "We need to get it back on track," she said. "We can't afford to lose any more time. Americans want action on legislation that will create jobs, cut our oil imports in half and reduce the carbon pollution that threatens us all."

In contrast, Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists, attempted to downplay the implications of Senator Graham's walk out, describing the incident as "a murmur, not a heart attack", raising hopes that a compromise could yet be reached.

But he insisted that the proposed climate bill represents the only current options capable of ensuring the US meets its stated climate goals, dismissing alternative plans put forward by a number of Senators last week.

"The energy-only bill from the Energy and Natural Resources Committee isn't enough to get the job done," he said. "For one, it would not spur renewable electricity development beyond what we already expect to achieve under current state and federal policy. The bill is simply not an alternative to comprehensive climate and energy legislation."

However, some environmental groups still think that the Kerry-Graham-Lieberman bill is so flawed that it should be canned permanently.

Kevin Kamps, who heads up subsidies research at Beyond Nuclear, lamented what he saw as excessive support for the nuclear industry in the proposed legislation. He argued that the American Clean Energy and Security Act passed



by the House of Representatives last June represents a better option. "The House Bill is not perfect by any means but it's so much better than the Senate Bill," he said, adding that the alternative Cantwell-Collins draft bill also offered an alternative approach.

Kamps, who called the Kerry bill "dirty energy" legislation, said that the environmental movement is increasingly turning to state-level initiatives to address climate change issues, as Congress proves increasingly gridlocked. "In fact, Congress wants to intervene in state and regional activities," he complained. "In Kerry-Lieberman-Graham, they were going to dismantle the state and regional level cap and trade initiatives."

Kassie Siegel, senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, similarly urged the legislation to turn its back on the current Senate machinations and concentrate on using the existing Clean Air Act as a tool to address climate change - something the Obama administration tried to pave the way for last year through an endangerment finding on carbon dioxide from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that would enable it to regulate carbon under the Clean Air Act.

"It makes absolutely no sense to roll back the successful laws we already have in exchange for a weaker framework," she advised.