



CLIMATE: 20 enviro groups praise Senate bill's targets, say they're 'encouraged'

(03/19/2010)

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Twenty environmental groups presented a unified front today on the emerging Senate climate and energy bill a day after meeting with one of the principal authors.

The Alliance for Climate Protection, Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council and other activist groups issued a statement saying they are "encouraged by the progress" made in recent weeks by Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) as they craft legislation that curbs greenhouse gas emissions and expands domestic oil, gas and nuclear power production.

Details on the draft Kerry-Graham-Lieberman bill trickled out of the Capitol this week after the senators met Wednesday with several major industry trade groups. In their statement, the environmental groups singled out the overall targets for praise.

"Their stated goal and commitment to a 17 percent reduction in carbon pollution by 2020 and an 80 percent reduction by 2050 represents the leadership needed by the U.S. Senate to create jobs, increase energy security, reduce carbon pollution and protect public health," the groups said. "Legislative details are important, and are not settled yet, and we will be working closely with the senators, their staffs and others to make sure these details achieve the goals."

Other groups signing the statement include Environment America, the League of Conservation Voters, the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Wildlife Federation, the Blue Green Alliance, the Center for American Progress Action fund, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the National Tribal Environmental Council, Environment Northeast, the National Audubon Society, Interfaith Power and Light, Conservation International, Defenders of Wildlife, Clean Water Action, the Wilderness Society, Climate Solutions and the Environmental Law and Policy Center.

But at least two other environmental groups have waded into the Senate climate debate with much sharper criticism of the still-evolving proposal.

Jacqueline Savitz, senior campaign director at Oceana, criticized the prospect of more domestic energy production off U.S. coasts, a provision Graham says will be included in the bill.

"While we have not been privy to the actual legislation, we are extremely concerned and perplexed about reports suggesting that the climate bill will expand offshore drilling into areas that were previously protected, and even more egregious, into areas like the waters off Florida's west coast that are currently protected by law," Savitz said.

The Center for Biological Diversity also is unhappy with the senators' plan to pre-empt U.S. EPA's ability to write climate rules through the Clean Air Act, calling that provision a "Senate Deal Killer."

"Enough is enough," said Kieran Suckling, the center's executive director. "Global warming legislation must do more than have the word 'climate' in it. If the soon-to-be released bill mirrors its description to date, the center will call on senators who care about preserving a healthy human and natural environment to vote against it."

Kerry yesterday urged environmental groups to be patient before making statements publicly about the climate proposal, which he hopes to introduce in mid-April. "They need to wait to see what we have and what's going on," he said.