



Enviro groups hold ‘encouraging’ meeting with Kerry on climate bill

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By Ben Geman

If a large collection of environmental groups is worried about the direction of Senate energy and climate legislation, they didn’t show it publicly Thursday evening.

High-level officials from 10 or so groups met with Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) for roughly 1.5 hours in his Senate office.

The meeting came a day after Kerry and Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) met with a cross section of industry trade groups about their upcoming bill – a measure that’s expected to include several industry-friendly concessions as the senators seek traction for their uphill effort this year.

Green group officials exiting the meeting Thursday declined to discuss specifics about the session. “We had a very encouraging meeting, and we are looking forward to continuing to work together to pass a comprehensive bill this year,” said Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters, after the meeting broke up.

“It was a productive meeting, it was positive,” said Dan Lashof, who directs the climate center at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The Senate trio plans to include provisions that make activists queasy, such as expanded offshore drilling, major financial support for building new nuclear power plants, and preemption of state and EPA global warming rules (although climate legislation approved in the House blocks key EPA rules and limits some state actions too).

But Lashof cautioned that “it’s still a work on progress, and progress is being made.”

In addition to LCV and NRDC, groups represented at the meeting were: The Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, the Center for American Progress, Environment America, Environmental Defense Fund, the Alliance for Climate Protection, and the Blue Green Alliance.

Some environmentalists have begun expressing concern about the Senate climate effort.

“The American public wants real action on climate change, not backroom deals that gut laws with 40 years’ worth of success such as the Clean Air Act. It’s hard to imagine what the Senate

thinks it is receiving in return for pandering to the likes of the American Petroleum Institute and Chamber of Commerce with a convoluted and speculative legislative proposal that won't come even close to solving the problem of global warming," said Bill Snape, senior counsel to the Center for Biological Diversity. The group was not invited to the meeting.

It's possible, of course, that the Senate could take up energy legislation that doesn't include greenhouse gas limits at all. If the Kerry-Graham-Lieberman effort can't gain traction, Senate Democratic leaders might opt to bring energy legislation to the floor that was approved in June by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senate Democratic sources say.

That bill includes a host of energy efficiency measures, wider financial support for low-carbon energy projects, a national renewable electricity mandate, and allows wider oil-and-gas drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, among other measures.

Environmental groups oppose what has been dubbed the "energy only" approach.