



## CLIMATE: Groups urge Obama to promise protection for EPA regs

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Days after former Vice President Al Gore criticized President Obama for failing to push hard to enact cap-and-trade legislation in the last Congress, a coalition of green groups is circulating a letter asking the president to vow he won't sign legislation that delays or loosens U.S. EPA's rules for carbon dioxide.

"We need you to provide the leadership you promised," says the letter, signed by leaders of 300 organizations. "We need you to stand up to big polluters and their congressional allies and publicly state that you will veto any legislative moves to repeal, weaken or delay the Clean Air Act's ability to curb greenhouse gas pollution."

While leaders of the groups say there is little threat that bills currently circulating will make it to Obama's desk, the letter is intended as a reminder to the president.

"We all realize there's going to be continued pressure from opponents as you move forward into negotiations over budgets, debt ceilings, things like that," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, which signed onto the letter. "If you don't sound off, you might be forgotten."

The Obama administration has taken steps to reassure environmentalists that it will defend EPA's regulations for heat-trapping emissions. Last week, White House press secretary Dan Pfeiffer told a conference of liberal bloggers that Obama had repeatedly promised to veto any bill that would delay Clean Air Act rules.

But some observers say that Obama has left himself wiggle room when it comes to even a permanent stay on EPA's climate change authorities. Ahead of a House vote on a bill that would do that (H.R. 910), the Office of Management and Budget released a statement on April 5 saying that if the bill arrived on the president's desk, "his senior advisors would recommend that he veto the bill."

Kevin Book, an energy analyst and managing director at ClearView Energy Partners, saw a distinction between this and an outright statement that "If presented with this bill, the president will veto it."

OMB issued such a statement on April 7 in response to a full-year continuing resolution for the Defense Department.

"There's no misplaced word or an incautious word," Book said. "Particularly given this administration's very cautious alignment with any issue, the use of the [statement of administration policy] as a signaling tool is very important here. We've had soft veto threats; we've not had explicit veto threats."

The administration and congressional Democrats declared victory in April when they kept policy riders off a fiscal 2011 spending bill that made deep cuts to spending for programs across the federal government. Having won on spending, Book predicted congressional Republicans would look for policy victories rather than steep cuts as the 2012 election draws closer.

"We think the Republicans are going to move from dollars to riders," he said, adding that even Republicans would find it hard to win re-election with a track record entirely composed of cuts to federal spending.

"It's actually very, very hard to win without spending money in America," Book said.

Meanwhile, Obama may find a temporary stay on EPA climate rules to be a valuable chit to trade for policy priorities of his own, like extending tax preferences for renewable energy industries or ending them for oil and natural gas, Book said.

Bill Snape of the Center for Biological Diversity, which signed the letter, seemed to agree.

"Would you bet the house right now that Obama has a line in the sand position on these matters?" he asked in an email, adding that the president might waver in his defense of EPA carbon rules in order to pass legislation he deems necessary.