

Felicity Carus 1st March, 2011

Republican proposals to cut the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) budget by almost a third is an attempt by climate deniers to roll back 40 years of progress in cleaning up America's air, water, industry and transport, according to campaigners. Earlier this month, the Republican-led House of Congress voted to cut federal spending by \$61bn in an effort to tackle the country's \$14.13 trillion national debt.

However the Republican bill includes a \$3bn cut to the EPA and a swath of amendments including controversial measures that would prevent the EPA from regulating carbon emissions, weaken provisions on the Clean Air Act (CAA) and the Clean Water Act, and cut off funding for the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Bill Snape, policy adviser at the Centre for Biodiversity in Washington, said the Republicans were trying to force through dramatic policy changes under the guise of balancing the budget: 'I don't think the American people quite understand yet what was in this bill and what Republicans are actually doing because their rhetoric is all about balancing the budget. This has nothing to do with balancing the budget. It is a wish-list of favours to corporate polluters who supported the Republicans in the last elections.'

The EPA has used the Clean Air Act to control pollution for 40 years. But in 2007 the US Supreme Court ruled that the EPA had the

US battle over climate regulation engulfs vital environmental budget



The fossil fuel industry is fighting plans to impose restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions

authority under the act to control greenhouse gases. Republicans and Democrats have now come to blows over this expansion of the EPA's authority - regarded as a 'plan B' for tackling emissions when climate legislation failed to pass through the US Senate last year. Katherine Sierra, senior fellow at the Brookings Institute for global economy and development in Washington, said: 'Climate legislation in the US was declared dead on arrival in the fall of 2010. After that, the Obama administration signalled it was going to use the regulatory authority of the EPA to meet its target stated at Copenhagen that it would reduce emissions by 17 per cent by 2020.'

'But Republicans, who in many cases ran on an anti-climate agenda in the mid-term elections last November, are now looking to use budget means to strip the EPA of its ability to take action.'

Election success has allowed the party to populate House committees with climate sceptics who have the EPA firmly in their sights. In February, Fred Upton, the Republican chairman of the House committee on energy and commerce, launched the draft Energy Tax Prevention Act, which said that 'Congress, not EPA bureaucrats, should be in charge of setting America's climate change policy.'

Republican bullying tactics

In a very public display of the displeasure among Republicans at the EPA's powers, the committee summoned its chief administrator, Lisa Jackson, on February 9 to justify her authority to regulate emissions. 'This bill appears to be part of a broader effort in this Congress to delay, weaken or eliminate Clean Air Act protections of the American public,' Jackson told the committee.

Joe Barton, a Republican Congressman from Texas, tried to dispel accusations of antipathy towards Jackson's EPA by offering to give her a hug.

Jackson ignored Barton's flippancy perhaps partly because the chairman emeritus of the committee is a self-declared Tea Party activist whose scepticism on the science of climate change is shared by Upton and others on the committee including Steve Scalise, Pete Olson, John Shimkus and Ed Whitfield who represent constituencies in states with fossil fuel interests.

In the 2009-2010 cycle, Upton and Barton together received \$858,620 in donations for campaign funds from electric utilities and oil and gas interests, according to OpenSecrets.org. In same the cycle, Koch Industries,

whose interests range from the oil sector to cattle ranches, donated \$1.9m in campaign funds, almost all of it to Republicans.

Snape said: 'Koch brothers have their fingerprints all over this budget bill. The Republicans have been captured by a very narrow segment of corporate interests that is oligarchical, not democratic. That's a disturbing trend.'