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CREATOR:Myron Ebell <mebell@cei.org> (Myron Ebell <mebell@cei.org> [UNKNOWN])

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SUBJECT:: Update on Senate climate title--good news

TO:Myron Ebell <mebell@cei.org> (Myron Ebell <mebell@cei.org> [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

BCC:Debbie S. Fiddelke (CN=Debbie S. Fiddelke/OU=CEQ/O=EOP [CEQ])

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

I think the word is out, so let me update everyone on what's happening with the climate title in Senator Domenici's energy bill. Republican members of the committee met last evening to talk about the energy bill draft. Several Senators raised concerns with the climate title. The Chairman agreed to have staff re-write the title with the understanding that members may still decide to advise/support leaving it out altogether. It is being written along two lines: first, by re-writing the current draft to take out the climate czar and White House office, take out early action credits, and weaken the national strategy language and put the Secretary of DOE in charge of the interagency group in charge of the strategy; and second, substitute some or most of S. 1294 from the 107th Congress (the Craig-Murkowski-Hagel bill, which was offered as a responsible alternative to Kyoto-style policies). These two drafts should be out today for review by Senate staffers. It is my understanding that the Chairman will then make his decision. Mark-up could still be on Thursday or could slip until after the recess.

So there are now three alternatives: a re-written draft with nearly all the bad stuff taken out; a re-written draft with less objectionable stuff put in; or no climate title in the Chairman's mark. We are making progress. No climate title is still the preferred alternative in my view and those I've talked to this morning (admittedly an unrepresentative sampling of the public). It puts the Chairman and right-thinking members of the committee in a stronger position to oppose Kerry, Lieberman, McCain et al with the argument that this issue is too important to toss in without much fuller consideration and debate. It also doesn't commit conservatives to supporting baby steps on climate action, which commitment is used by the alarmists to argue that conservatives agree that global warming is a problem but are unwilling to do anything serious about it. (Actually, the only serious response is long-term scientific and technological research, as was laid out in President Bush's program. The leading alarmist scientists now agree that Kyoto-style attempts to control emissions is a dead end and that long-term technological innovation is the correct and only real response.)

Until we hear about Chairman Domenici's decision, we can't do a whole lot, but I urge everyone to thank Chairman Domenici (perhaps through his committee chief of staff Alex Flint) and tell him that you strongly support the decision to re-write or (preferably) drop the climate title. Senator Domenici and his staff deserve full credit for taking our criticisms seriously and without rancor and for putting the draft out in the first place for public reaction. I can think of few committee staffs I have dealt with over 15 years who have been so pleasant, capable, and conservative. The Senator has put together a first-class operation. I also urge you to thank those members of the committee (and their staff) who voiced their concerns. I don't know who spoke up and who didn't, but most likely our strongest allies are Senators Nickles (McLane Layton),

Craig (George O'Connor), Kyl (Brenda Burman), Thomas (Celia Wallace), Talent (Katie Swaney), Burns (Chris Heggem). My apologies to anyone I've mistakenly included or left off.

Thanks to everyone who has worked so enthusiastically on this on such short notice. We'll need to keep working, but we're moving in the right direction.

[This WSJ editorial is now out of date, but still makes the right points.]

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Tuesday, April 8, 2003

REVIEW & OUTLOOK (Editorial)

A Republican Kyoto

When the Senate Democrats' energy bill died last year, the economy dodged a major blow. Who knew we'd get more of the same from Republicans?

That's the essence of the "climate" provisions in Senator Pete Domenici's new energy legislation. They would gut President Bush's program to voluntarily reduce greenhouse gases, putting the U.S. on a path to the Kyoto treaty that Al Gore negotiated but the Bush Administration repudiated.

The draft bill would require a national strategy to "stabilize and over time reduce net U.S. emissions of greenhouse gases." That more or less concedes the alarmist argument that greenhouse gases are "pollutants" that cause global warming and thus deserve to be controlled.

Mr. Domenici would also create a federal climate czar and office, thus creating a bureaucratic imperative for regulation. And he'd award "credits" to companies that take early action to reduce CO2 emissions, the first step toward a cap-and-trade system that would make business a new lobby for greenhouse gas controls.

The only explanation for this pre-emptive concession is defensive politics. Republicans describe it privately as the only way to deflect more drastic legislation from Democratic Presidential aspirants or GOP liberals. Republican Senators also hope their House brethren will ride to their rescue and kill the worst provisions before they become law.

There is a better way, which is to keep fighting on the merits. There is no scientific consensus that greenhouse gases cause the world's modest global warming trend, much less whether that warming will do more harm than good, or whether we can even do anything about it.

Once Republicans concede that greenhouse gases must be controlled, it will only be a matter of time before they end up endorsing more economically damaging regulation. They could always stand on principle and attempt to educate the public instead.