

ARMS 294

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TEXT:

1 CLIMATE CHANGE

Bush advisors go head-to-head with lawmakers on climate change policies

J.L. Laws, Environment & Energy Daily staff writer

Four of President Bush's advisors Thursday defended his decision to withdraw from an international treaty aimed at cutting global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to below 1990 levels in favor of more studies and a voluntary program aimed at slowing the growth of GHG emissions, telling members of the Senate Commerce Committee that Bush's approach is a "serious but measured response" that will save billions of dollars and millions of jobs in light of scientific uncertainties surrounding rising global temperatures.

"While the potential for human-induced climate change is real and deserves serious attention ... the uncertainty surrounding the ultimate consequences of climate change and the necessity of a long-term effort to address it combine to suggest that severe and costly near-term measures to reduce emissions are not warranted," R. Glenn Hubbard, chairman of the president's Council of Economic Advisors, told committee members.

Hubbard and Jim Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, cited a 1998 Energy Information Administration report that said participating in the Kyoto Protocol, a United Nations-backed treaty requiring industrialized countries to cut GHG emissions an average 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012 would cost the United States more than \$400 billion in lost economic output and nearly 5 million jobs by 2015.

A short time after EIA issued that report, the Senate unanimously approved a resolution indicating it would not support the Kyoto treaty in any form that could hurt the U.S. economy or failed to require developing countries to share the burden. The Clinton administration continued to try to negotiate a treaty more favorable to the United States, but in spite of any strides it made it seemed clear the Senate wouldn't ratify the agreement. Even so, congressional Democrats continued trying to build support for measures capping GHG emissions from power plants and

passenger vehicles, but the efforts gained little traction.

Everything changed in March 2001, however, when, shortly after taking office, Bush turned his back on a campaign promise to regulate carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from power plants. That same month, he sparked a global outcry by announcing he would not seek Senate ratification of the Kyoto agreement, but didn't propose an alternative.

When Bush did publicize his proposals -- two new \$40 million science and technology initiatives announced in June 2001, followed in February by two major atmospheric initiatives, one a voluntary program aimed at cutting GHG emissions 4.5 percent by 2012, as well as a separate mandate requiring power plants to cut emissions of mercury, nitrogen oxides (NOx) and sulfur dioxide (SO2) by about 70 percent by 2018 -- critics immediately assailed them, arguing the climate change initiative was nothing more than a "business-as-usual" approach and that his proposal would allow more power plant pollution than a competing Senate measure.

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington served to draw attention away from Bush's controversial climate change policies, but the White House reignited the controversy in late May with its Climate Action 2002 Report to the United Nations. The report, drafted by the Environmental Protection Agency and other agencies and approved by Connaughton's office before the State Department submitted it, said human actions, namely burning fossil fuels, are largely to blame for rising global temperatures. It acknowledged increasing temperatures would significantly alter daily life and ecosystems in the United States over the next few decades. But instead of offering new policies to reverse the trend, the report suggested the United States would have to adapt to the changes, and promoted Bush's plans to continue studying the issue and encourage voluntary GHG actions by U.S. industries.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who presided over the hearing, argued the "dire warnings" in the Climate Action Report justify more than voluntary programs to curb rising global temperatures.

"The president says he recognizes the need to decrease emissions, but [his policies] don't set a cap, there's no requirements, no market force," Kerry said. "Why should Americans be satisfied that this is a reasonable response to this crisis -- this problem -- we face?"

Hubbard argued the administration is proposing slowing the growth of GHG emissions in the short term, but hasn't ruled out more aggressive action later should greater scientific understanding of climate change justify it. He said rapid, mandatory cuts in GHG emissions would require billions of dollars of investment to replace equipment that has yet to run its useful life, in spite of lingering questions about whether such investments are even necessary or whether they would have a significant impact.

Connaughton said "there's no doubt" GHG emissions will continue to rise

under Bush's approach. But later, in response to a similar line of questioning from Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), he said, "We shouldn't be looking at policies that promote the stagnation of our economy as a solution."

Moreover, James Mahoney, Bush's assistant secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, warned committee members that principally targeting CO2, the approach taken by the Kyoto Protocol and Sen. Jim Jeffords' (I-Vt.) bill, S. 556, would be an expensive undertaking that could have little if any noticeable effect. "CO2 is a player, likely the major player, but there could be other culprits that may also be first order -- black carbon and water vapor," he said. Scientists know little about how black carbon, otherwise known as soot that is the result of incomplete combustion, and clouds, which occur naturally but can also be formed by human actions, affect the global climate system.

The administration plans to develop more reliable forecasts to better inform policy-makers on the variables influencing global temperatures, but may need as many as five years to do so, Mahoney said, repeating testimony he offered Wednesday during a similar House Science Committee hearing.