

EPW Committee evaluates President Obama's Climate Action Plan

On Thursday, January 16, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW) held a full committee hearing on the implementation and effects of President Obama's Climate Action Plan (CAP). Witnesses included the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, and the Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Instituted in June 2013, CAP plans to reduce carbon pollution, grow the green economy, prepare for the adverse effects of climate change, and commit U.S. leadership in a global initiative to combat climate change. Proponents of the President's climate policy believed that the plan will help improve environmental health while maintaining a robust, competitive economy. Opponents of the President's plan argued that unnecessary CAP regulations will stymie economic development.

Democratic members mentioned anecdotal accounts of the detrimental effects of climate change in their respective states, such as the economic damage to infrastructure and tourism in New Jersey caused by hurricane Sandy, while Republicans criticized the EPA, which is charged with implementing a number of CAP regulations, and argued that climate science is not wholly undisputed. Because cutting carbon pollution is integral to the CAP, debate ensued over the EPA's right to regulate CO₂ under the Clean Air Act. The EPA's new directive focuses on standards associated with power plant emissions, which currently contribute to 33 percent of total carbon emissions in the U.S. Many opponents of CAP also expressed concerns about the Treasury Department's reticence in their development of the carbon tax. Opponents also stated that without international participation, U.S. efforts to curtail emissions will have little effect on global climate.
