

President Obama's Climate Action Plan

Senate Environment and Public Works Full Committee hearing on President Obama's Climate Action Plan

January 16, 2014

Witness Panel I

The Honorable Gina McCarthy

Administrator, United States Environmental Protection Agency

The Honorable Nancy Sutley

Chair, Council on Environmental Quality

The Honorable Dan Tangherlini

Administrator, United States General Services Administration

The Honorable Daniel M. Ashe

Director, United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Witness Panel II

The Honorable Bill Ritter

Director, Center for the New Economy, Colorado State University

Dr. Andrew Dessler, Ph.D.

Professor of Atmospheric Sciences, Texas A&M University

Dr. Daniel A. Lashof, Ph.D.

Director, Climate and Clean Air Program, Natural Resources Defense Council

Dr. Judith Curry, Ph.D.

Professor and Chair, School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, Georgia Institute of Technology

The Honorable Kathleen Hartnett White

Distinguished Senior Fellow-in-Residence and Director, Armstrong Center for Energy and the Environment, Texas Public Policy Foundation

Committee Members Present

Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Chairwoman

David Vitter (R-LA), Ranking Member

Mark Udall (D-CO)

James Inhofe (R-OK)

Thomas Carper (D-DE)

Jon Barrasso (R-WY)

Ben Cardin (D-MD)

Jeff Sessions (R-AL)

Michael Crapo (R-ID)

Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)

Jeff Merkley (D-OR)

Deb Fischer (R-NE)

Cory Booker (D-NJ)

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). Instituted in June 2013, CAP attempts to reduce carbon pollution, to grow the green economy, and to address adverse effects of climate change within the U.S. and internationally by committing U.S. leadership in a global climate initiative.

Two expert panels of climate scientists and government administrators were called to testify before the committee, including Gina McCarthy, Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is charged with implementing many aspects of the president's Climate Action Plan, and Daniel Ashe, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Proponents of the climate legislation testified that the President's plan will help improve environmental health and curb the effects of climate change while maintaining a robust economy. Opponents of the president's plan, however, argued that CAP regulations will unnecessarily stymie economic development to avert a phenomenon which they do not entirely believe is real.

Republicans protested the implementation of new EPA regulations. Sen. Vitter (R-LA) equated the president's plan with a "regulatory avalanche" that will "diminish manufacturing jobs" and adversely affect the U.S. economy. Senators Crapo (R-ID) and Sessions (R-AL) underscored Vitter's comments, arguing that taxpayers have yet to see any benefits from the approximately \$77 billion already spent on climate change mitigation technology between 2008 and 2013, according to a Congressional Research Service report.

A keystone of the President's plan is to reduce carbon emissions by 17 percent by 2025 through techniques such as carbon capture and sequestration (CCS). Debate ensued over the EPA's right to regulate CO₂ under the Clean Air Act, in which Senator Boxer (D-CA) stated that the Supreme Court's 2007 decision "unambiguously" covered CO₂ under the Endangerment Finding. However, Kathleen Hartnett White from the Texas Public Policy Foundation argued that nothing in the Clean Air Act provided basis for centralized federal energy planning. Regardless, the EPA's new directive is to focus on standards for power plant emissions which contribute 33% of total domestic CO₂ emissions.

Republicans also shared concerns that without international participation, U.S. efforts to curtail emissions will have little effect on global climate. Nancy Sutley, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, testified that the U.S. is "working through international forums on hydrofluorocarbons, green tech, and clean energy" to combat climate change internationally.

-SRM
