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Jobs & national security dominate 2nd day of climate debate

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In the second day of Senate Environment Committee hearings on the Kerry-Boxer climate change bill Wednesday, Committee Ranking Member James Inhofe (R-OK) said that “Based on all the evidence we’ve seen, in this and other committees in the Senate, I can say with confidence that Kerry-Boxer will destroy jobs, weaken our national security, and raise electricity prices for consumers.” Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) warned that passing the Kerry-Boxer bill would “push the economy into permanent recession.”

Former U.S. Republican Senator John Warner who represented Virginia from 1979 until he retired from the Senate last January, expressed a very different view. He testified that “the linkage between global climate change, greater energy independence, and national security” remains “an issue of great importance to me.” Warner certainly was concerned about that linkage back in 2007 when he introduced “America’s Climate Security Act of 2007.” That earlier cap-and-trade bill was killed by Warner’s Senate Republican colleagues who argued then – as Inhofe and other Republicans argue now – that a cap-and-trade system forcing large-scale polluters to pay for their CO₂ emissions would damage the U.S. economy.

With his warnings echoed by Deputy Undersecretary Kathleen Hicks speaking for the Defense Department and Retired Vice Admiral Dennis McGinn, Warner testified that “if left unchecked, global warming could increase instability and lead to conflict in already fragile regions of the world. We are talking about energy insecurity, water and food shortages, and climate-driven social instability. We ignore these threats at the peril of our national security and at great risk to those in uniform. . . The Central Intelligence Agency’s long-term forecasting arm, the National Intelligence Council, recently reported that global warming could directly impact the U.S. by threatening energy supplies, damaging military bases, increasing food and water shortages and stressing the economy.”

Echoing other warnings voiced repeatedly in the hearings, Warner explained that the U.S. is lagging behind in the green technology race: “If the U.S. does not get in front now, we risk ceding the technology ground to China and other nations that are investing in renewable energy, investing in research and development at a much faster pace than we are. We have a chance to not only reduce CO₂ emissions, but to help move our economy

in the right direction and to create new industries and jobs here at home. We can help revitalize our manufacturing base, but not if we end up having to buy . . . technology from China. If that is not a reason to act now, I do not know what is.”

Warner called on senators to act on climate change “because climate change threatens what Americans value: our young men and women who defend this country, our traditions, and economy. We must take the opportunity to reshape our failed energy system and create new jobs for our families.”

Vice Admiral McGinn noted that with or without Congress, the U.S. military is moving aggressively to free itself from “the stranglehold of petroleum” – as in flying F18 “Green Hornet” fighters with high-performance biofuels. Others warned that if Congress fails to act, then, as ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. EPA will regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

Vice Admiral Dennis McGinn, USN, Retired, Member, Military Advisory Board, CNA: “. . . our economic, energy, climate change and national security challenges are inextricably linked. And it is also clear that our past pattern of energy use is responsible, in a significant way, for our economic situation today. For these reasons, we must take a long range, comprehensive view to develop effective national policies and make real and positive changes to the ways in which we power America. A business-as-usual approach, continued over reliance on fossil fuels, or small, incremental steps, simply will not create the kind of future security and prosperity that the American people and our great Nation deserve. The time to act, and act boldly, is now.”

After hearing from Warner and other witnesses about the opportunities for new jobs and new green industries, the committee also heard witnesses called by Senator Inhofe. Opposing the Kerry-Boxer bill, James Sims, President and CEO of the Western Business Roundtable, testified that “Legislation that aims to reduce emissions by forcing a further contraction of our economy, by artificially constricting energy supply and encouraging higher prices, will choke any economic recovery and will be soundly rejected by the American people.”

Boxer summed up her answer to Inhofe and the Republicans’ witnesses by saying that “this is about the future versus the past” – and promising to move ahead with committee action on the climate bill next week following this week’s hearings.

For copies of the written testimony from the 54 witnesses in this week’s three Senate climate-bill hearings Oct. 27, 28 and 29, as well as webcasts of three hearings, go to: <http://epw.senate.gov>.