



Trio of Senators release climate change 'framework' with few details

By Sara Wyant

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Washington, Dec. 11. Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), and Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) released what they described as a "framework" for comprehensive climate change and energy independence legislation on Thursday. However, their "plan," which was delivered in a letter to President Barack Obama, provided few details and seemed to offer more of a signal than substance for delegates attending climate change talks in Copenhagen.

"Over the past month, we have been working together to develop consensus on a comprehensive pollution reduction and energy independence plan. Support is building to simultaneously create jobs, protect our national security interests, and improve our environment. As you depart for Copenhagen, we wanted to provide an assessment of where we see the debate heading in the United States Senate," the Senators wrote in a letter to the President.

According to the letter, the Senators agreed on setting a 17% target for greenhouse-gas reductions from 2005 levels by 2020. That's the same combination President Obama tentatively offered to international negotiators at Copenhagen, but weaker than the 20% target set in a bill that passed out of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee last month.

In addition, they called for "encouraging nuclear power" and "ensuring a future for coal" but there was no specific language included for how to do so. One graph focuses on agriculture:

Creating wealth for domestic agriculture and forestry. While emissions from agriculture will not be regulated, climate legislation will provide farmers with new opportunities to benefit from reducing their carbon emissions. Offset projects and other incentives will enable farmers to develop new income streams, as environmentally-friendly farming practices dramatically increase in value once a price is placed on carbon. According to USDA Secretary Vilsack, "the economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers can potentially outpace, perhaps significantly, the costs from climate legislation." In addition, a new USDA study released last week shows that this can be accomplished without an appreciable rise in food prices. While we are still discussing the details of the offset program with our colleagues, we have reached agreement that we will include significant amounts of real, monitored and verified domestic and international offsets and other incentives in our system in order to contain costs and create opportunities for farmers, ranchers and forest owners to benefit from climate change legislation.

In a statement responding to the letter, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said, “The President believes this is a positive development towards reaching a strong, unified and bipartisan agreement in the U.S. Senate.” Obama is scheduled to attend the United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen next week along with other world leaders, and the U.S. is under pressure to offer commitments to make significant cuts in its consumption of fossil fuels.

The full text of the letter is available here:

http://kerry.senate.gov/newsroom/pdf/Climate_Framework.pdf

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