

Climate Legislation: *What a Mess!*

Position Statement by NC WARN:

Although national legislation isn't usually NC WARN's bailiwick, we've been closely following the long-running debate over regulating carbon emissions.

It's clear that 2,400 energy industry lobbyists have lately turned the highly complex Waxman-Markey bill into a labyrinth of loopholes. However, even before then, NASA's Jim Hansen, environmental justice advocates and many others opposed the various approaches to "cap & trade." As Dr. Hansen argues, ***"Empirical evidence shows that cap & trade does not have a prayer of phasing out fossil fuel emissions fast enough to save the planet ..."***

That's largely because trading pollution credits would enrich hordes of speculators and protect polluters while doing little to curb emissions, among other reasons. Europe's cap & trade failures support those concerns.

Also, it appears Duke Energy and other corporations have rigged the process so that any trading scheme could take years to implement. And Duke made sure a loophole would allow continued construction of its coal-fired power plants at Cliffside and Edwardsport, Indiana. Although Reps. Waxman and Markey have progressive records, it's obvious that corporate polluters still control both parties of our quasi-democracy.

Many sides criticize the Waxman-Markey bill, but a number of environmental groups argue we should all hold our noses and support it anyway, hopefully after some meager improvements (although efforts to strengthen the bill are fractured). The argument goes that "something" is better than nothing, and that if passed, cap & trade could steadily be enhanced.

It seems more likely that the phalanx of polluters and their hired climate confusionists would demand that the hard-fought trading scheme be given years to produce results. **And even bill promoters admit its many loopholes could allow CO2 emissions to continue increasing.** Meanwhile, we have only a handful of years to start reducing emissions before climate change becomes irreversible, according to the leading climate experts.

Among the bill's numerous other problems: it allows mountaintop removal coal mining to continue. Also, the renewable energy section has been gutted, and even includes nuclear and "clean coal" subsidies.

We commend those who have fought the industry's lobbying juggernaut, but **we cannot support an approach that results in a bill that nearly ensures climate catastrophe and allows communities to continue suffering the ravages of coal power.**

We agree that the U.S. should go to climate negotiations in Copenhagen this December with a strong position. But a weak, pro-polluter law will not fool the world community just because it has “climate” in the title. Nor should other countries model such poor climate policy.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY: One idea – with several variations – is often supported as superior: Put a direct price on fossil fuels at the mine, well or point of entry into the U.S. Then rebate this fee directly to the public on a *per capita* basis. Start low, but steadily increase the fee. This drives up the cost of energy usage, rewards those who cut wastage, and spurs implementation of efficiency and clean technologies. Also, it would be more predictable for businesses and far easier to administer. A key corollary is that any national bill must phase out the burning of coal. (See *Dr. Hansen’s testimony to Congress on our home page*)

The hitch? Washington insiders consider a fee & rebate plan politically impossible. Why? Because giant corporations and their allies decreed at the outset that such a proposal was off the table.

At this juncture, we’re on Dr. Hansen’s side. As *The Economist* magazine put it on May 21st, ***“The country needs to seize this opportunity and introduce a simple carbon tax ... it will be transparent and far, far cheaper than the impact of serious climate change.”***

That can happen only if public interest groups expose the gross deficiencies of the Waxman bill. Simultaneously, we must continue ramping up a broad, diverse, and vocal grassroots movement to stop climate change. This means moving beyond the conventional DC culture of lobbying and compromise that has helped bring humanity to the brink of runaway climate change.

That grassroots movement – which is beginning to take shape – must pressure President Obama to provide leadership, and not allow those who caused the problem to sell us a phony solution that does more harm than good. We must organize for a democratic transformation of how our most urgent policies are made.

NC WARN will keep up to date with Greenpeace and other national allies in demanding real climate protection, and watch for specific actions to recommend to our members and allies.

Meanwhile, the mess in Washington validates our belief that North Carolina’s best focus is to block Cliffside and pass the NC SAVE\$ ENERGY bill. Lastly, it is vitally important to work with Democracy NC and others to clean up the legalized bribery known as “campaign financing.”