

Advocates press Congress on renewable energy standard

August 2 2010, By Lauren French

Renewable energy advocates are pushing Congress to include a renewable electricity standard in a climate bill that was proposed Tuesday in the Senate, and the idea got a boost this week when 27 Democrats and a Republican pressed for its inclusion.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat, has assured his party that a mandate requiring utilities to obtain a percentage of their power from renewable resources won't be included this summer's bill, but that didn't stop the 28 senators, who promoted the mandate's job-creating possibilities.

"A strong RES (Renewable Energy Standard) will give certainty to [clean energy](#) companies that are looking to invest billions of dollars in the U.S. to manufacture [wind turbines](#), solar panels and other renewable energy components," the senators said in their letter to Reid.

Democratic Sens. Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, Mark Udall of Colorado and Tom Udall of New Mexico spearheaded the effort.

Denise Bode, the chief executive of the American Wind Energy Association, said that a [renewable electricity](#) standard would bring manufacturing and clean energy jobs to the country. She worried that legislative delay would derail attempts to spur clean energy job growth.

"If we fail to do this as a country, then we won't get the jobs," Bode said. "It is a win on every front."

While Reid has said that he doesn't have the 60 votes needed to advance the climate bill, Bode said that advocates of a [renewable electricity](#) standard have 62 Senate votes for such a mandate.

Bode said that this year, for the first time in five years, coal has generated more new electricity than renewable sources have. More alarming, she said, is the pace at which China and the European Union are encouraging this technology, meaning that manufacturing jobs are likely to head overseas. And competition with the EU and China, Bode said, is the reason the United States can't afford politicking with an energy bill.

Robert Jones, a partner with Alston & Bird law firm, echoed that fear and said the upcoming campaign season has caused Congress to stall.

"This is an opportunity for the U.S. to be a leader, and we have to capture that," Jones said.

In 2009, Bode said, 35 new wind plants were built, creating half a million new jobs. This year, however, that growth is down 70 percent because the government has yet to pass legislation that would bring manufacturers to the U.S. for the long term, she said. When companies buy wind contracts, they tend to do so for 10- to 20-year periods.

The lone Republican fighting for the mandate's inclusion is Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback, who sat on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee last summer when it passed requirements that 15 percent of the nation's electricity come from renewable sources by 2021.

"As we begin consideration of comprehensive energy legislation, it's essential we include ideas that will help drive our national energy production in the direction of more clean, [renewable energy](#)," Brownback said in a statement. "In this case, a moderate RES would be

an important step towards a cleaner energy future."

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