

US Senate to hold all-night climate change talkathon (Update)

March 10 2014, by Michael Mathes



Senate Majority Leader Senator Harry Reid speaks to reporters on Capitol Hill
March 5, 2014 in Washington

Dozens of lawmakers will try to push climate change higher up the US political agenda Monday, launching an all-night Senate session pushing for legislation to reduce the global warming threat.

At least 28 Democrats including Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will

participate in the session—mocked by Republicans as a stunt—from after the last vote Monday though until Tuesday morning.

The overnigher is the first major effort by the newly-created Climate Action Task Force in Congress, which wants to kick-start public debate on climate change.

"On Monday we'll be sending a clear message: it's time for Congress to wake up and get serious about addressing this issue," Senator Sheldon Whitehouse said in a statement.

The effort is backed by President Barack Obama, who has signalled he will use his executive authority wherever possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

But climate legislation is opposed by many Republicans—and some Democrats—and faces tough opposition in Congress

Obama "has taken steps in his first term and again in his second term and will continue to take steps to... reduce our carbon emissions," White House spokesman Jay Carney told reporters.

No Republicans are scheduled to participate in Monday nights marathon debate, highlighting the political divide.

The issue is especially touchy this year, as lawmakers kick off campaigning for the November mid-term elections, and legislation on the issue is unlikely to pass a divided Congress in 2014.

No major climate change legislation has become law in recent years, after an energy bill that would have established a cap and trade emissions system passed the Democratic-controlled House in 2009 but stalled in the Senate.

The House measure was seen as a contributing factor in Republicans seizing control of the chamber in the 2010 elections.

Democrats accuse Republicans of being in the pocket of big oil and gas companies and putting their heads in the sand when it comes to controlling greenhouse gas emissions.

"Climate change is real, it is caused by humans, and it is solvable," said Senator Brian Schatz. "Congress must act."

Too 'alarmist,' Republicans warn

But Republicans attack Democrats for pushing pie-in-the-sky reforms like mandatory emission caps and environmental regulations that kill jobs.

Several conservatives in Congress openly question whether human activity plays a role in the planet's changing temperatures, rising sea levels or shifting storm patterns.

Republicans mocked the all-nighter as Democrats "talking to themselves" and noted that even though Democrats run the Senate, they will not introduce or debate any particular climate legislation.

In a pre-emptive strike, Senate Republican Jeff Sessions told the chamber Monday that "there has been a lot of exaggeration. There has been a lot of hype."

And he warned that the cost to the economy of programs proposed by Democrats would run into the hundreds of billions of dollars.

"I think it's time for us to be a bit more cautious, a bit less alarmist," he said.

The Union of Concerned Scientists, which praised the event, noted that Congress is already contending with effects of climate change, such as passing drought relief legislation, "even if some members dare not say the words."

"What we need is a much bigger national debate about how we can respond to the risks scientists have uncovered about climate change and how we can reduce emissions," said Angela Anderson, director of the alliance's Climate and Energy Program.

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