

Climate warnings ignored with US elections looming

May 15 2014, by Steven R. Hurst

The U.S. Congress, ignoring dire new warnings about climate change, continues to shy away from legislation that might mitigate the effects of global warming, leaving President Barack Obama with limited tools to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are partly responsible for melting glaciers and rising sea levels.

The United States is the second-largest producer of [carbon dioxide](#), the heat-trapping gas that is a byproduct of burning coal, oil and natural gas. China is in first place. Curbing those emissions and switching to energy sources such as wind and solar will be expensive and harm the economy in some U.S. states, especially those that depend heavily on coal mining and oil extraction.

Given that reality and upcoming congressional elections in November, lawmakers—including some Democrats—are more reluctant than ever to tackle legislation that would put limits on emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gasses.

Republicans have a good chance at taking the majority in the Senate, and Democrats are fighting most of their toughest races this year in conservative-leaning states that rely heavily on the energy industry, including Louisiana, Arkansas, Kentucky, West Virginia, Alaska and Montana.

Conservative groups already have spent millions of dollars accusing Democrats in those states of supporting [energy policies](#) that would

impede local jobs and economic development.

Next month, the Obama administration is set to release new regulations on emissions from coal-burning power plants. Opponents of the move claim the president and Democrats have declared war on coal.

The American Energy Alliance, which has spent more than \$1 million on television criticizing Obama's energy policies and candidates who support them, said it's more than likely the emissions rules will wind up in the group's election ads this year.

"It wouldn't matter when they were coming out, but it just so happens to be an election year as well," said Tom Pyle, the group's president. "That's not something that's gone unnoticed by us."

But it is not just politics. Many Republicans say they do not believe the science that shows man-made climate change as a major threat to civilization.

"I do not believe that human activity is causing these dramatic changes to our climate the way these scientists are portraying it," Sen. Marco Rubio said over the weekend. He is a likely candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016.

That is a common response, despite the recent high-powered scientific warnings that the United States and the rest of the world already are losing the battle against climate change.

On Monday, two groups of scientists reported that a big part of the massive West Antarctica ice sheet is cracking apart and continued melting cannot be stopped. The melting of the sheet and other adjacent fields of ice could raise sea levels by 10 feet (3 meters) in coming centuries.

A few days earlier, a federal report said Americans already were in the grip of [climate change](#), once seen as a challenge still well in the future.

The report noted that winter storms have increased in frequency and intensity and have shifted northward since the 1950s. Also, heat waves, such as those in Texas in 2011 and the Midwest in 2012, are projected to intensify nationwide. Sea level has risen 8 inches (20 centimeters) since 1880 and is projected to rise between 1 foot and 4 feet by 2100.

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