

Aiming at Trump, House OKs bill to keep US in climate accord

May 2 2019, by Matthew Daly

The Democratic-controlled House approved a bill Thursday that would prevent President Donald Trump from fulfilling his pledge to withdraw the United States from the landmark Paris climate agreement and ensure the U.S. honors its commitments under the global accord.

The bill falls far short of the ambitious Green New Deal pushed by many Democrats, but it is the first significant climate legislation approved by the House in nearly a decade. The measure was approved, 231-190, and now goes to the Republican-run Senate, where it is unlikely to move forward. Trump has said he will veto the legislation if it reaches his desk.

Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Fla., head of the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, said passage of the bill sent an important signal that Democrats are prepared to act on global warming after reclaiming the House majority in last year's elections.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., called the House bill a "futile gesture to handcuff the U.S. economy through the ill-fated Paris deal" and said it "will go nowhere here in the Senate."

Trump pledged in 2017 to withdraw from the Paris agreement as soon as 2020. It was a major blow to worldwide efforts to combat global warming, and distanced the U.S. from its closest allies. Trump said he was "elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris."

The White House said in a statement this week that the House bill "is inconsistent with the president's commitment to put American workers and families first, promote access to affordable, reliable energy sources and technologies and improve the quality of life for all Americans."

The White House also asserted that the bill would interfere with Trump's constitutional authority to conduct foreign policy, including the power to withdraw from an executive agreement that Congress has not ratified.

The Paris agreement, signed in 2015 by more than 190 countries, is a U.N. initiative intended to bring the world together in the fight against climate change. Signed by President Barack Obama, the pact commits the United States to cut greenhouse gas emissions by more than 25 percent below 2005 levels by 2025.

The U.S. also pledged \$3 billion to a fund that helps developing countries fight climate change.

Democrats said the bill showed that the U.S. will remain a leader on climate issues. "America does not cut and run. America keeps its commitments," Castor said.

Caster noted that she and her family boarded up and fled their Florida home during Hurricane Irma two year ago, and said she understands the urgent need to act on climate change. The House bill, she said, "will help us carry out our moral obligation to future generations to tackle this crisis now."

Republicans derided the bill as a largely symbolic effort that would harm the American economy while doing little or nothing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.

Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, the No. 2 House Republican, said the bill

would "wreck the economy" and cost as many as 2.7 million American jobs that he said would go to China, India and other countries that do not have to meet goals under the Paris accord until 2030.

"We don't want to lose the great economic gains we have achieved, and we don't want to lose the reduction in carbon emissions that we've been able to achieve over the last 19 years because of ... great innovation in technology that America has always been known for," Scalise said at a news conference. "Let's not yield those kinds of gains to countries like China and India who emit five times more carbon than we do."

Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., said the Democratic measure was "simply another messaging bill to go on record against President Trump."

Three Republicans voted in favor of the bill: Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, Vern Buchanan of Florida and Elise Stefanik of New York.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., the lead House author of the Green New Deal, voted in favor of the bill, but declined a request for comment afterward. Groups aligned with that initiative have complained that the bill does not go far enough to address climate change.

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Citation: Aiming at Trump, House OKs bill to keep US in climate accord (2019, May 2) retrieved 8 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-05-house-paris-climate-agreement.html>

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