

Time running out on the 'one opportunity' for a climate bill

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When President Joe Biden went to Capitol Hill in October to arm-twist for his signature environmental and economic legislation, many Democrats remained hopeful the bill's climate provisions would survive.

But Rep. Alan Lowenthal, D-Calif., was worried. If the [bill](#) failed, Congress might not get another shot for years.

"We've never done that before—really reduce emissions," Lowenthal said in an interview. "This is the one opportunity. If we don't do this now, if we don't really begin to lower emissions, this planet has no chance. ... We have a few years left and that's it."

He paused. "The planet is dying."

Seven months later, Washington's focus has moved to the war raging in Ukraine; [midterm elections](#) threaten the Democrats' thin majority on Capitol Hill; emissions have roared back following pandemic lockdowns; and the likelihood of Congress passing legislation to match the scale of the [climate](#) crisis appears slim.

The House passed that budget reconciliation bill, a roughly \$2 trillion climate and social policy piece of legislation, in November. But the bill, which all 50 Republicans and two Democrats in the chamber oppose, is languishing in the Senate.

Without it or similarly ambitious federal legislation, the U.S., responsible for the largest portion of carbon pollution of any country, will miss its target of cutting emissions in half by 2030 and zeroing them out by 2050, experts say.

While Republicans and Sens. Joe Manchin III, D-W.Va., and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., oppose that bill, senators are making headway in preliminary talks about a separate climate and [energy bill](#), Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., said last week during an event organized by Ceres, an environmental advocacy nonprofit.

That bill includes steps to speed permitting for offshore wind energy,

expand [tax incentives](#) for low-carbon energy sources, levy a fee on methane emissions and impose a tariff on energy-intensive goods like steel, cement, fossil fuels and petrochemicals.

Text of the bill should be ready within weeks, said Whitehouse, who outlined paths for the reconciliation legislation and a separate climate bill.

"As long as the tracks don't get confused, I think we're in reasonably good shape, and as long as the bipartisan effort isn't used to handicap or even kneecap the reconciliation effort, then it's all to the good," Whitehouse said.

Rep. Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., the chairman of the Energy and Commerce environmental subcommittee, said in an interview last week there was support for climate-focused tax incentives.

"I think people are together with the investments we need to make for some of the tax incentives," Tonko said, adding that tax provisions passed into law for years "provide certainty" to companies.

Asked about topics that have bipartisan support, Tonko cited electric vehicle charging stations, environmental justice investments, and investment and production tax credits for renewable energy sources. "I want there to be certainty so they take on the fullest value they can," he said of the tax credits, specifically.

Swing vote

Climate groups have accused Manchin, who has nixed a handful of climate proposals this Congress and is the swing vote to make or break a climate bill, of insincerely joining the Senate negotiations.

"If we are serious about tackling inflation and reducing the deficit, it's time to get real and get to work with good-faith negotiations to reach a deal that the entire Democratic caucus can support by Memorial Day," Jamal Raad, executive director of Evergreen Action, a climate advocacy organization, said in a statement. "The clock is ticking, time to get this bill over the finish line."

The 117th Congress is running out of time to pass a climate bill. There are 73 days until Election Day when at least one chamber of Congress is scheduled to be in session and 98 days until the end of the year with the Senate, House or both slated to work.

And the next Congress may be far less inclined to take up climate legislation. Nathan L. Gonzales of Inside Elections forecasts Republicans regaining control of both chambers of Congress as the most likely outcome for the midterm elections.

As lawmakers negotiate, climate-linked crises unfold.

Since March, heatwaves in India have affected billions. The American West is in its worst drought in 1,200 years, according to work published in *Nature Climate Change*, an academic journal. Water levels in Lake Mead are at their lowest ever since it was filled in the 1930s. Another human-made lake, Lake Powell, which feeds Glen Canyon Dam, which in turn provides electricity to millions in Arizona, is perilously low heading into the summer.

The U.N. warned last week that no country is "immune" to drought and that drought could affect three-fourths of all humans by 2050.

There is a 50 percent chance humans will stop warming Earth before it heats up 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, a critical threshold beyond which climate damages intensify.

"Every fraction of a degree of warming matters," Ko Barrett, senior adviser for climate at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said before a House science committee April 28. "The climate we and future generations experience depends on our actions now."

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