U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up
Prepared by the Office of Public Affairs

Friday, February 15, 2013

Table of Contents

Blog Round-up

CLIMATE CHANGE / GLOBAL WARMING 2
A walk through the week's climate news (Grist) 2
How Can President Obama Cut Carbon Emissions Without a Climate Bill? (*Treehugger*) .. 4
Tina Gerhardt: U.S. Climate Bill, Regional Accords or State Leadership? (Huffington Post) 6
Kreutzer: . . . A Little of a Bad Thing Doesn't Make It Good (*Heritage Foundation*)..... 7

CLIMATE CHANGE / GLOBAL WARMING

A walk through the week's climate news (Grist)

The Climate Post: Beating a dead climate horse
by Christopher Mims
5 Aug 2010 3:08 PM
Bonn climate talks, Boulder, China, Clean Air Act, Climate & Energy, climate bill, climategate, coal ash, Department of Energy, EPA, Jay Rockefeller, Montana, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Obama administration, Politics, Russia, smart grid, solar panels, subsidies, Texas, US Chamber of Commerce

First things first: The U.S. won't be getting even a significantly stripped-down climate and energy bill, or won't until September at the earliest, at least in part because of a debate over the provision that would have eliminated the liability cap of $75 million on offshore drilling. The White House says a bill could still be passed this year, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) says it might be a broader bill than the one that was originally slated to be voted on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration's fallback effort to regulate carbon emissions via existing EPA authority under the Clean Air Act is under heavy bombardment. Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) wants to amend any energy bill to delay EPA action on carbon emissions for two years, which, according to a White House spokesperson, would lead to a veto. Rockefeller says this amendment will come up again, attached to any number of other bills.

Multiple petitions filed by Peabody coal, Texas, Virginia, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce questioning regulation of greenhouse gases were flat-out rejected by the EPA, mostly on the grounds that "Climategate" isn't a real scientific controversy. Texas responded by combining its objections to greenhouse gas regulation with its objections to the EPA overruling its use of

"flexible air permits" when regulating air quality in general. The state has pledged non-cooperation with the federal government on both counts.

"You can always count on Americans to do the right thing: This week, U.N. climate negotiators preparing for the next international climate meeting in Cancun met in Bonn, where they expressed pessimism in the wake of U.S. failure to pass climate legislation even as the U.S. re-affirmed its commitment to meeting its pledge to cut greenhouse gases. At the start of the meeting, researchers announced a new, more comprehensive CO2 emissions model describing exactly how much greenhouse gases can be emitted in order to stay below 3.6 degrees F of warming.

… after they've tried everything else": An analysis by Bloomberg News revealed that fossil fuel subsidies in the U.S. are 12 times as large as those for renewable energy, and a bipartisan coalition formed to block EPA regulation of coal ash -- the stuff left over after burning coal -- as hazardous waste.

Montana, a state rich in coal, upped its own renewable energy standard to 25 percent of electricity generated by 2025, while a coalition of appliance makers convened ahead of meetings with the Department of Energy (DOE), hammering out efficiency standards for dishwashers, refrigerators, and other appliances that could lead to significant energy savings.

We're #2: Behind China, the U.S. was the second fastest-growing wind power market in the world in 2009, but 2010 is expected to be a slow year. Financing woes, general economic malaise, and competition from Chinese firms mean that wind turbines are going for fire-sale prices.

Storage of the intermittent power from renewables got a boost when the DOE made its 14th loan guarantee, for $17.1 million, to A123 systems for grid-scale banks of batteries. (A123 is also providing batteries for the forthcoming Chevrolet Volt.) Xcel energy also announced a successful test of a gigantic one megawatt grid-scale battery. Dupont will build a factory in Virginia for domestic production of more-efficient batteries for electric vehicles.

Here comes the sun: The DOE thinks grantee 1366 Technologies can produce silicon solar cells at half their current cost, Spain is cutting its solar incentives by 45 percent, and the U.K.'s incentives -- specifically feed-in tarrifs -- have made it the fastest-growing solar market. California is about to get its first commercial scale solar-thermal plant in 20 years.

Boulder's experiment in building a Smart Grid is way over budget, Chicago is the first city in the U.S. with a subdivision sporting net zero energy homes, and, on the other side of town, citizens are trying to shut down the city's ancient coal fired power plants.

Overall, mostly late-stage renewable energy startups hit a record of $1.5 billion in investment in the second quarter of 2010.

Would the real culprit for the death of the climate bill please standup?: A working paper from Yale argues that increased unemployment leads to decreased concern about the environment.

Climate change winners and losers: The ongoing heatwave in Russia (this is Moscow's hottest July ever) inspired President Dmitri Medvedev -- who has in the past referred to climate change as a Western conspiracy -- to do an about-face on the issue. The damage to Russia's wheat crop (and projected flooding in Canada) contributed to the fastest rise in wheat prices since 1973.

Globally, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration declared it the hottest decade on record. Climate scientists pointed out that Philadelphia's record July temperatures are predicted to be the norm by 2050.

Alaska's growing season is getting longer, but climate scientists project agricultural "upheaval" this century for one of the world's largest exporters of food, Australia.

Devastating floods struck Pakistan, and paleoclimatologist James White projected that sea level rise sufficient to swamp Miami is now unavoidable.

After the climate bill: Frank O'Donnell, president of the Clean Air Watch, is one of many activists turning their attention to all the other issues the struggle for a climate change bill pushed aside. He had this to say to Politico:

It's quite obvious for the last several years that the climate debate has sucked up all the oxygen from other environmental issues. After the fighting and exhaustion of climate, there are a lot of other issues waiting in the queue.

148513
Christopher Mims is a journalist who specializes in sustainability, technology, energy, and climate change. He writes regularly for Wired, Scientific American, Technology Review, Popular Science, and GOOD. He also writes a weekly roundup of climate policy and related news for the Nicholas Institute at Duke University called The Climate Post.

How Can President Obama Cut Carbon Emissions Without a Climate Bill? (*Treehugger*)

With Congress still not able to get out of its own way and actually move forward any legislation with the word 'climate' in it, what options does President Obama have to make good on his oft-stated commitments to make reductions in greenhouse gas emissions? Leaving aside the (remember it's now officially a pollutant), over at Climate Progress, the executive director of the has some good suggestions:

First is a great suggestion: Create a national clean energy roadmap and part of that is helping all states adopt a series of energy and climate policies outlined by the . These 23 sector-based policies at the state level would create 2.5 million net new jobs by 2020 while reducing emissions 27% below 1990 levels--that's well over 10% below what the President has pledged, if

still not in line with scientific recommendation.

Second is Declaring a war on energy waste. It's pretty shocking to think that the US economy wastes 87% of the energy it consumes, and that in energy efficiency it ranks 22nd in the world. Or maybe it's not, considering that the US doesn't rank near the top of many indices for social welfare, only topping the charts when it comes to military spending. But I digress...

PCAP urges Obama to challenge the US to by 2035, something which could be done by improving energy efficiency at the rate of 3.1% annually.

Number three requires Congress, but avoids the dreaded C-word. It's also something which about half the staff at TreeHugger has written is a crucial but overlooked component of reducing oil consumption and sound climate policy. It's Reinventing national transportation policy.

Since transportation is responsible for such a large percentage of oil consumption and greenhouse gases, shifting federal funding from overwhelmingly supporting new road-building to supporting mass-transit (and creating more walkable/bikeable communities) is key in tackling climate change and oil dependency. It's also . Going right along with that is Stopping fossil fuel subsidies. The way PCAP describes it is brilliant: The oil, coal, and gas industries in the United States are like 50-year-old children still on the breast. They are mature and ridiculously wealthy; the shouldn't need taxpayers to subsidize them.

Currently the US gives than clean energy sources.

The IEA says phasing out over the next decade the $560 billion subsidies that fossil fuels get annually would achieve more than 30 percent of the cuts in carbon emissions necessary to keep rising atmospheric temperatures at no more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Fossil fuel profits and the expense of taxpayers and a planet with a roughly comparable climate to that of today? Sounds like a bad bargain.

The last suggestion is perhaps the most under-publicized, yet potentially hugely effective, of the lot: Make ecosystem restoration a cental strategy in climate mitigation and adaptation.

Rehabilitating ecosystems which human activity has degraded is hugely helpful in reducing the impacts of storms along coastlines, increasing the ability of the landscape to absorb carbon emissions, controlling erosion, flooding, and more. To accomplish this through human machination is a far more expensive proposition than simply working with nature so that it can do it naturally, and except for the costs of getting our artifices out of the way and restoring the landscape, do it for free.

Good thoughts all around. Far less contentious than crossing the Rubicon with the EPA cutting out Congress and having a go at regulating carbon emissions itself.

Tina Gerhardt: U.S. Climate Bill, Regional Accords or State Leadership? (Huffington Post)

In June, 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a climate bill. It intends to reduce greenhouse gas (ghg) emissions 17% by 2020 based on 2005 levels. The success, taken in tandem with the promise to rein in ghgs made by President Obama at the COP 15 in Copenhagen, gave some hope that the passage of a U.S. climate bill might be underway.

Yet on July 23, 2010, just a week before the current UNFCCC meeting, the U.S. Senate shelved climate legislation, making it unlikely that it will be passed this year.

The subject has been the source of considerable concern and conversation here at the UNFCCC climate talks in Bonn, Germany.

In an interview conducted the week prior to the UNFCCC, lead U.S. climate negotiator Todd Stern sought to reassure, stating that the U.S. remains prepared to reduce ghg emissions.

On Monday, U.S. climate negotiator Jonathan Pershing reiterated the position, seeking to dispel frustrations about the lack of a U.S. climate bill and concern about its potential ramifications not only for the U.S. climate but also for the U.S.'s willingness to sign on to a legally binding, international agreement.

"Many of you," Pershing said, "have asked about the status of U.S domestic efforts and in particular about U.S. congressional activity. Let me respond."

"The United States is not backing away from the commitments our President made in Copenhagen. President Obama has made it clear that he remains committed to taking bold action to address the growing threat of global warming. He said so again last week."

"Passing comprehensive legislation remains the primary vehicle in our view in our country to tackle this challenge. But at the same time, we will use all the tools available to make progress .... Success in Cancún does not hinge on U.S. legislation."

Alternatives: Federal Agencies, Regional Accords and State Leadership

Meanwhile, the World Resources Institute (WRI) released a report the day the Senate shelved the climate bill, asking if a 17% reduction in ghg emissions by 2020 based on 2005 levels were possible under existing federal laws and through state action.
http://www.wri.org/publication/reducing-ghg-emissions-using-existing-federal-authorities-and-state-action.html

The WRI report concluded that "the federal government and states can put the United States on a near-term course to considerably reduce greenhouse gas emissions." It based its analysis on existing EPA authority and potential state legislation.

Some states have already taken action to implement laws that rein in ghgs. In 2006, Governor

Arnold Schwarzenegger - who attended the Copenhagen climate negotiations - committed California to a 25% reduction in ghg emissions by 2020 based on 1990 levels through AB 32. It was the first such statewide mandate in the United States.

As Terry Tamminen, former head of California's EPA and adviser to Governor Schwarzenegger on energy and the environment pointed out: "AB 32, highlights what can be achieved. Aside from what it legislated for the state, it led to numerous regional efforts: such as the Western Climate Initiative, which led to the Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Accord."

Ranking the different options, the WRI report states that while executive orders and state legislation offered "a lackluster" to "middle-of-the-road scenario", the regional accords provided a "go-getter scenario," naming three regional agreements in the U.S.: the Western Climate Initiative (WCI), the Midwestern Accord, and east coast Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

The Western Climate Initiative (WCI) consists of seven western U.S. states and four Canadian provinces; the Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Accord (MGA) includes six midwestern U.S. states and one Canadian province; and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) encompasses ten northeastern U.S. states.

Given the slow - in the olden days, we used to say glacial - pace of the international negotiations, these state and regional efforts just might be harbingers of how best to reduce ghg emissions and to address climate change in the near future, rather than waiting for an international agreement.

Kreutzer: . . . A Little of a Bad Thing Doesn't Make It Good (*Heritage Foundation*)

Outlet Full Name: Heritage Foundation
News OCR Text: The election of President Obama, coupled with increases in the margins of control held by Democrats in both the House and the Senate, made sweeping climate legislation seem like a sure thing. And the House did go on to pass the Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade bill.

However, ensuing voter backlash to a bill that would raise energy costs and tax the economy in the middle of a deep recession slowed the momentum for equivalent Senate action. Then along came last winter's "climategate" scandal, which severely eroded public confidence in the global-warming science that supposedly justifies climate legislation.

Why are global-warming bills and similar measures so unpopular? Because they cost so much and help so little. The Center for Data Analysis at The Heritage Foundation found that the aggregate lost national income (GDP) from the Waxman-Markey bill would be more than $9 trillion for just the first two dozen years of a 40-year program. That adds up to thousands of dollars per year per family -- and leads to energy price increases of 50 percent to 90 percent.

Even using the questionable Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's estimates of temperature change, this sacrifice would moderate temperatures by theoretical but unmeasurable thousandths of a degree by 2050 -- and, at most, tenths of a degree by the end of the century.

One of the reasons there is so little impact, even in theory: The developing world wants to keep developing, which requires more energy. China recently passed the United States as the largest total emitter of carbon dioxide and is projected to have double our emissions within several years. Starting at even lower per-capita levels than China, other developing countries, such as India and Brazil, will be large emitters as they too strive for economic growth. The projected growth in emissions from these countries dwarfs our cuts under cap and trade, rendering such policies futile as well as expensive.

Seeing the unattractive tradeoff such legislation presents, sponsors started claiming their legislation stimulates instead of stifles the economy. It is almost humorous to see how the titles of nearly identical pieces of legislation have changed.

The Senate bill, S. 2191, started as "Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act of 2007." A little more than one year later, Waxman and Markey didn't even mention climate in their "Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009." When the polls clearly showed that people didn't like the idea of losing millions of jobs for thousandths of a degree, Sens. John Kerry and Barbara Boxer called their bill the "Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act."

But changing titles cannot change the economics of the policies. Capping CO2 will cut energy to the American economy, and this will hinder economic growth. This is not just the conclusion of conservative economists. The Brookings Institution's analysis of generic cap-and-trade measures shows how it stunts GDP. Obama's own EPA and Department of Energy, along with the Congressional Budget Office, show negative impacts on the economy in their analysis of the cap-and-trade bills.

The unbalanced cost-benefit relationship makes climate legislation fundamentally unappealing. That is why the Senate is having so much trouble passing cap-and-trade. Voters don't want it.

Moreover, the equations don't hold out much hope for compromising on scaled-down legislation. Giving up $100 to get $1 is a bad idea that doesn't get better by saying, "We will start by trading a dollar for a penny." The tradeoff just doesn't make sense.

For now, it seems, climate legislation in the Senate is blocked by understandable voter opposition. But the lame-duck session following the elections may unleash the same special-interest feeding frenzy that led to the passage of Waxman-Markey in the House a year ago. Stay tuned.