

Washington Monitor

Congress Debates Global Warming

Since its opening on January 4, the 110th Congress has become a key battlefield in the intense debate on global warming and climate change. New Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) signaled early on that climate change would be a key issue during her stewardship of the House, and she has since convened a Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming.

Competition was fierce for seats on the global warming panel, which is chaired by Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), but the Committee's jurisdiction is limited and certain legislative moves will have to be approved by House leaders or designated standing committees. Furthermore, the Committee has drawn limited attention to this point and gotten off to a bit of a slow start. Congressional leaders, on the other hand, had no problem drawing widespread attention when they brought former Vice President Al Gore before House and Senate panels on March 21 to discuss his work on climate change issues.

Gore, fresh off his win at the Oscars for his documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth*, was returning to Capitol Hill for the first time since he finished his term as Vice President in January, 2001. He told members of Congress that "Our world faces a true planetary emergency" and that it will take "uncommon moral courage" to pass corrective legislation without undue delay.

Gore specifically urged an immediate freeze on levels of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions. He also discussed the need for sharp reductions in emission levels and proposed a tax on carbon emissions.

While Gore was met with great enthusiasm from Capitol Hill crowds, the media and most of his former Congressional colleagues, including a few prominent members, attacked his message. Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK), well-known as a global warming skeptic, criticized Gore for excessive carbon usage at his home in Tennessee. Gore's mansion has been the subject of widespread media coverage for its size and presumed energy consumption levels. The former vice president did not directly refute Inhofe's attacks, instead indicating that he lives a "carbon-neutral" life. Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX) and Rep. Dennis Hastert (R-IL), Pelosi's predecessor as Speaker of the House, both attacked Gore's proposals, indicating that a carbon tax would harm average Americans and increase the cost of electricity. Barton went as far as to criticize the scientific basis of Gore's arguments and the rationale behind *An Inconvenient Truth*. Hastert mainly conceded that he agreed with Gore's assessment of climate change but differed as to potential remedies.

While the timing of the debate on Capitol Hill has clearly been influenced by the political shifts that took place in the 2006 midterm elections, there is also little doubt that geographic and climate

science research from the last 15-20 years has helped push the debate on climate change to the fore as a political issue. Based on that research, the international Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has shifted its official position on climate change over the past two decades. In 1990, the IPCC asserted that there was no clear anthropogenic explanation for climate change. In 2001, the Panel stated that humans were "likely" at fault in global warming. In 2007, the IPCC has expressed near certainty that humankind is to blame for climate change. In each case, the IPCC has cited emerging research in the field and promoted the scientific evidence backing their position.

Supreme Court Rules on EPA

Washington has also been abuzz of late about the potential political ramifications of the Supreme Court's 5-4 decision on April 2 that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) violated the Clean Air Act when it refused to regulate emission standards for new vehicles to control the pollutants that scientists say contribute to global warming. The decision has pushed Capitol Hill closer to passing comprehensive global warming legislation, something the Congressional leadership has promised to do by July 4. Key senators have already signaled that they intend to summon EPA officials to discuss how the Supreme Court's decision will be enforced. ■

AAG Welcomes David Coronado

The AAG welcomes David Coronado, who recently joined the staff as Communications Director. An award-winning graphic designer with experience in community relations, David has led major web initiatives at the Round Rock Independent School District and the Scott & White Healthcare System in Texas.



Coronado

David earned a bachelor's degree in communication from St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas and will begin pursuing a master's degree in public communication from American University this fall. His responsibilities at the AAG will include the redevelopment of the AAG's web site, building media

relations, and enhancing communication programs.

A fan of the arts, David enjoys live music, theater, film, and the occasional opera. He is currently cultivating a new found appreciation for spectator sports, including the Washington Nationals and the University of Texas Longhorns. ■