

Governors say climate policy could create jobs

WASHINGTON—Three Democratic governors told a Senate panel Tuesday that efforts to curb global warming and spur the development of cleaner sources of energy have created jobs and new businesses in their states, a trend that could expand nationwide if Congress passes federal legislation.

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All three states -- New Jersey, Colorado, and Washington -- have adopted measures to achieve reductions in the gases blamed for global warming and standards requiring a certain percentage of electricity from renewable sources.

But this view was not shared by all state leaders testifying Tuesday before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, including North Dakota's Republican governor and a Democratic state legislator from Arkansas, highlighting regional differences in addressing climate change.

A bill passed earlier this summer by the House that is now under consideration by the Senate would impose the first nationwide limits on greenhouse gases and require electric utilities to produce at least 12 percent of their power from pollution-free sources such as wind and solar energy by 2020.

"If there is a lesson...for other states and the nation as a whole, it is that good energy policy and climate policy can energize the economy and help create good-paying private sector jobs," said Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter, Jr., although he did not specifically endorse the House-passed bill.

To illustrate his point, Ritter described the transformation of Pueblo, Colo., from an old steel town to a center of wind turbine production.

Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire said her state has already created in two years nearly twice the 25,000 new "green" jobs it set as a goal to reach by 2020. Those workers include architects who design energy-efficient buildings, venture capitalists investing in new technology, and farmers growing the next generation of biofuels, she said.

New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine said the state has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent and is looking to construct wind farms offshore. He told the panel national leadership was needed to create the energy future the country needs.

But Republican Gov. John Hoeven of North Dakota said the legislation under consideration would cause job losses in his oil-producing state. The prospect of a climate change bill already has halted new technologies to harvest oil and natural gas, Hoeven said.

He was joined by Arkansas state Rep. John Lowery, a Democrat and the owner of Lowery Oil Co., who said that while the bill may create green jobs for the West Coast and Northeast, it would harm middle America.

"It might be popular for some in Washington to demonize oil and gas, fertilizer and chemical companies, and farmers," Lowery said, "but where I come from, they are an integral part of our communities."

The House bill would set up a cap-and-trade system. Under such a regime, limits would be placed on emissions of greenhouse gases and a market would be created where business could buy and sell permits to pollute.

"As I've stated before, cap-and-trade benefits the coasts at the expense of the heartland," said Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, the panel's top Republican.

Lawmakers from the West coast and Northeast, which have less manufacturing and have already taken strides to clean up their energy supply, contend the bill will be an economic boon.

"We are facing two historic challenges today -- the current recession, and the dangers of unchecked global warming," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., the committee chairwoman. "And we have the opportunity to address both with a single solution."