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Statement on Climate Bill Action in Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Friends of the Earth President Erich Pica responded to today's vote to report an energy and climate change bill out of the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee:

"It is extremely disconcerting to hear scientists speak about the level of action needed to prevent radical and dangerous climate destabilization, and then to see how far short even one of the most environmentally friendly committees in Congress has fallen.

"While the bill reported out of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee today is in some ways better than the bill that passed the House in June—for example, it protects some important Clean Air Act provisions (others are still eliminated)—it remains a woefully disproportionate response to the tremendous economic, security and public health threats posed by global warming.

"The bill's backbone is a poorly regulated carbon trading scheme that entrusts the Wall Street bankers who brought us the current economic crisis with the responsibility to solve global warming. The bill showers polluting corporations with billions of dollars, but doesn't require them to reduce pollution fast enough to avoid devastating climate change impacts. And it contains massive carbon offset loopholes that would allow U.S. polluters to keep polluting by paying for often-non-existent pollution reductions overseas. Other loopholes, such as excluding pollution from bioenergy, also undermine the bill's intent.

“These flaws are unacceptable, and they are the result of a defective political system in which polluting corporations, Wall Street traders, and their lobbyists continue to exert far too much influence. Too many senators are siding with special interests instead of advocating solutions that are in the public interest. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who today voted ‘no’ while making the absurdly contradictory claims that he wants to fight climate change but that this bill is too strong, is one such senator.

“Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) now appear to be moving forward with an attempt to produce an even weaker bill—one friendlier to the oil, coal and nuclear industries. Senators who wish to be responsible shepherds of their constituents’ tax dollars, as well as stewards of our planet, should reject such giveaways.

“Most Republicans are more closely aligned with Senator James Inhofe (R-Ok.) than Senator Graham. Inhofe is still in denial about basic aspects of climate science. Instead of participating in the legislative process, he threw temper tantrums and boycotted this week’s hearings. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) deserves credit for not yielding to his and other Republicans’ stall tactics.

“The lack of aggressive action by Congress falls far short of the global community’s expectations. People around the world are hoping for U.S. leadership in addressing the climate crisis, but the approach represented by this bill is so weak it could cause international climate negotiations to disintegrate.

“Congress has a tremendous opportunity to strengthen our economy, create millions of green jobs, and stabilize our climate, but that opportunity is being squandered. This must change. In the meantime, the Obama administration must be aggressive and immediately use its legal mandate under the Clean Air Act to crack down on polluters, and forward-thinking state and local officials must also continue advancing their own solutions.”

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Friends of the Earth and our network of grassroots groups in 77

countries fight to create a more healthy, just world. We're progressive environmental advocates who pull no punches and speak sometimes uncomfortable truths to power. Our current campaigns focus on clean energy and solutions to global warming, protecting people from toxic and new, potentially harmful technologies, and promoting smarter, low-pollution transportation alternatives.