

Senators Cantwell and Collins introduce much needed alternative into climate debate

Submitted by BSchreiber on Fri, 12/11/2009 - 17:24

Senators Maria Cantwell and Susan Collins have introduced the Carbon Limits and Energy for America's Renewal (CLEAR) Act, which is a much needed addition to the climate debate in the Senate. The [bills in the House and Senate](#) are rife with loopholes, give free handouts to polluters, and trust the integrity of the system to Wall Street traders who are more interested in gambling on carbon derivatives than getting environmental results.

The CLEAR Act's Strengths

The CLEAR Act offers several key improvements over existing climate legislation in the House and Senate.

- Limits the scope of carbon market: The Cantwell bill limits trading to companies which need carbon shares (permits), and does not allow Wall Street to hoard or speculate on carbon.
- Recycles revenue directly to taxpayers: The CLEAR Act rebates most of the money raised directly back to consumers instead of trusting that profit-driven utilities will return it to them. This is essential to ensuring that those Americans, who are most at risk, are not disproportionately burdened.
- Auctions 100% of allowances: The CLEAR Act does not allocate permits to polluters. Instead it requires all polluters to pay for their pollution.
- Does not contain any emissions offsets: The bill does not compromise the integrity of the system by allowing polluters to purchase offsets that are inherently unverifiable and may not actually lead to real reductions in carbon. Instead the bill puts a price on carbon, making polluting industries bear the price for their pollution.
- Maintains the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency to enforce the Clean Air Act: The Clean Air Act is a tool that over the decades has proven to be successful in cleaning our air, as well as our water. The House climate bill would gut EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gases under this important act. The CLEAR Act maintains EPA authority, allowing for a multi-layered approach to dealing with climate change.

Core Areas to Improve

There are several areas where the CLEAR Act must be improved:

- Inadequate Targets: The mandatory greenhouse gas limits are insufficient to set us on an emissions path which would reduce carbon concentrations to 350 ppm, a level that scientists say is needed to prevent the worst effects of climate change.
- Perverse Incentive for Bioenergy: By not covering emissions from biomass energy, the bill provides a perverse incentive to producers of bioenergy even though they can have emissions levels similar to those of coal.

Conclusion

The Cantwell bill is an important contribution to the climate debate that will hopefully reinvigorate a process that has become captured by the interests of Wall Street and big polluters.

Read [Friends of the Earth President Erich Pica's statement about the CLEAR Act](#)

Read [a letter from progressive groups](#) about the CLEAR Act