

WORC

Western Organization of Resource Councils

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Climate bill is off target

New study shows path to electric power without coal or more nuclear power

Billings, Mont. - The recently unveiled energy and climate bill missed an opportunity to transition to clean energy, according the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC).

Announced last week by Senators John Kerry and Joe Lieberman, the American Power Act seeks to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases. In addition to proposing huge taxpayer subsidies to promote coal, natural gas, and nuclear power, the group charged the bill would weaken the Clean Air Act and pre-empt state programs to curb greenhouse gas emission and could lead to exemptions of many existing power plants from health and environmental laws.

In a [statement](#) released Friday, WORC leaders criticized the bill.

“WORC supports real and effective climate solutions and clean energy investments,” said Ellen Pfister, a Montana rancher and chair of WORC’s Coal and Climate Change Campaign Team. “However, we cannot support the legislation proposed by Senators Kerry and Lieberman. Instead of retooling our energy infrastructure it focuses on providing money and resources for unproven technologies to preserve coal generation, offshore drilling and nuclear power.”

“This bill does not build a bridge to a new energy future,” said Randy Joseph, a community wind energy developer in Oregon and chair of WORC’s Clean and Renewable Energy Team.

A day before the release of the Kerry-Lieberman bill, the nonpartisan Civil Society Institute issued a new report prepared by Synapse Energy Economics outlining how the United States could move to a cleaner and healthier approach to meeting its electrical power needs without using coal or new nuclear power plants.

Using only existing technology and current policy, the Synapse report develops a “Transition Scenario” for 2010-2050 and compares it to “business as usual.” Some highlights of the report are:

- Aggressive investments in more efficient technologies in every sector could reduce electricity use by 15 percent from today's requirements, or over 40 percent from a “business as usual” scenario.

- The U.S. could feasibly retire the entire fleet of coal-fired plants and build no new coal-fired generation. Tens of billions could be saved in avoided pollution control costs at the coal-fired plants retired between 2010 and 2020.
- Electric sector emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) fall by 82 percent relative to predicted 2010 levels. Emissions of nitrogen oxides fall by 60 percent over the study period, and emissions of sulfur dioxide fall by 97 percent. Electric sector mercury emissions are virtually eliminated.
- Renewable energy, including wind, solar, geothermal and biomass, would increase throughout the nation, eventually providing half of the nation's electricity requirements.
- By 2040, the Transition Scenario would save \$5 billion annually and \$13 billion annually by 2050. These are direct costs only; they do not include savings resulting from reduced CO₂ emissions or public health costs. (A recent National Academies study estimated the annual health impacts of power generation in the U.S. at \$62 billion in 2005.) For a typical residential consumer, purchasing about 900 kWh per month, the 2020 cost increase would amount to about \$2.20 per month. By 2040, the same customer would be saving about \$1.50 per month and by 2050, saving nearly \$4.00 per month.

“A clean, renewable energy future is within our reach,” Joseph said. “The Synapse report shows an alternative approach that would meet our electricity needs without the use of coal or new nuclear plants. This approach would give us the same reductions in carbon emissions through a stepped-up program of energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy, instead of bailing out the coal and nuclear industries.”

Based in Billings, Mont., WORC is a network of grassroots organizations representing farmers, ranchers, landowners, and consumers in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

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The Synapse Energy Economics report can be found at www.CivilSocietyInstitute.org. WORC’s statement is available at www.worc.org. The complete text of the Kerry-Lieberman American Power Act discussion draft is available at <http://kerry.senate.gov/americanpoweract/intro.cfm>.