

It's official: The US climate bill won't clear the Senate before Copenhagen

Under pressure not to show up at Copenhagen empty-handed, US President Barack Obama has been pushing domestic climate legislation that would include emissions targets. His efforts ran aground on November 3, when Republican senators refused to debate a draft bill before the Senate.

Republicans have publicly said the proposed law—popularly known as the Kerry-Boxer bill—will impose a financial burden on industry and consumers. A few Democrats, including Max Baucus, have also expressed reservations. It needs 60 votes to pass through the Senate, which has 57 Democrats, 41 Republicans and two independent senators.

The bill aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent over 2005 levels by 2020. These cuts are far less than what climate scientists say are needed to avert a temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius—and much less ambitious than what developing nations are asking of industrialised countries in climate talks.¹

Despite this, the Kerry-Boxer bill is facing a rough ride through the US Senate. As hearings started on October 26, prominent Democrat leaders were recruited to endorse climate action. (The President himself announced \$3.48bn in government grants to projects modernizing America's electrical grid, while visiting a solar plant in Florida the day before.)

But many of their Republican counterparts continue to question the reality of climate change. "I don't believe it is a problem at this point," John Barasso, a Republican Senator from Wyoming, said in a media report. Republican Senator Jim Inhofe from Oklahoma was quoted saying: "...we go through cycles and there's not that strong a relationship between anthropogenic gases and climate change."

On November 3, Republican Senators collectively boycotted a key vote on the Kerry-Boxer bill, arguing that deliberations should be suspended until new studies about economic impacts are ready. The studies—which will take about five weeks—virtually guarantee the bill won't pass before Copenhagen climate talks open on December 7.

Meanwhile, a new poll survey released by the Pew Research Centre said the percentage of Americans who believe that global temperatures are rising, has fallen sharply from 71 per cent in April 2008 to 57 per cent in 2009. However, the majority of Americans think the US should join other countries in setting standards to address global climate change

¹ For a detailed analysis of the bill's targets, see: <http://www.cseindia.org/equitywatch/pdf/Kerry-Boxer%20Box.pdf>