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## **Senate Opens Debate on Politically Risky Bill Addressing Global Warming**

**By JOHN M. BRODER**

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Monday opened a raucous debate over climate change legislation even though it will put supporters of the bill, including all three presidential candidates, on the spot — essentially forcing them to come out in favor of high energy costs at a time when American consumers are paying record fuel prices.

While the three candidates are on record favoring legislative action on global warming, the Bush administration opposes a far-reaching bill.

The measure's sponsors say the nation must take immediate action to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and cut carbon emissions, but many senators in both parties see the legislation as an expensive long-term plan that would do little to solve today's energy supply and price problems. In fact, the legislation is not expected to pass in the Senate this year.

The debate, which could last all week, will force senators to take a stand on some of the most difficult, expensive and potentially life-altering questions the world will face in coming decades.

And lawmakers on Monday embraced the challenge, voting 74 to 14 in favor of the first of several procedural steps needed to bring the bill to the Senate floor.

Thirteen Republicans, including the minority leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, voted in opposition as did one Democrat, Robert C. Byrd, from the coal-producing state of West Virginia.

Proponents say the nation cannot afford to wait until fuel prices come down to begin to deal with these problems. Opponents argue that the bill would direct the largest changes in the American economy since the 1930s and should not be rushed through without painstaking debate.

“There’s a great feeling all across America by people in small villages and towns to large cities to state legislatures and others: we must move and move now,” Senator John W. Warner, Republican of Virginia and a co-sponsor of the bill, said as debate opened on the floor. “Do something. Doing nothing is not an option. Let us do something.”

But critics of the bill said it would do more harm than good.

“Any action has to provide real protections for the American economy and jobs, and we must protect the American families,” said Senator James M. Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma. “Any action should not raise the cost of gasoline or energy to American families, particularly the low-income and elderly who are most susceptible to energy costs.”

The debate is shaping up as both a landmark moment and an opportunity for both sides to score political points. Opponents could pay a price for voting to block legislation that is intended to slow and ultimately reverse production of greenhouse gases that scientists warn are exacting an increasingly heavy environmental toll.

Even though high energy prices and an overheated political climate pose serious obstacles to such a far-reaching bill this year, whatever the Senate does will set the terms of the debate when a new Congress and president take office next January.

The heart of the bill is a plan to cap the production of greenhouse gases that scientists blame for the warming and, for the first time, force polluters to buy permits to emit carbon dioxide. For better or worse, putting a price on those emissions could be a wrenching change.

All three major presidential candidates have expressed support for the cap-and-trade concept that underlies this legislation, but all have said they would like to see changes in the current bill. The Democratic candidates, Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama, would like to see its pollution targets strengthened, while Senator John McCain, a Republican, is demanding that it provide more help for the nuclear power industry.

All three candidates said that their schedules for the week were in flux but that they would participate in debates and votes if they were in Washington.

The bill's chief promoter, Senator Barbara Boxer, Democrat of California, said that the Bush administration had failed to address either energy costs or global warming and that Congress had to step into the breach now.

“There were a lot of voices saying, ‘Why do this now? Why do we have to do this now?’ ” Mrs. Boxer said, opening the Democrats’ argument for the bill. “Because it is, in fact, one of the greatest challenges of our generation and we have to respond with a landmark bill, and it will take us awhile and we must get started.”

The bill is a revision of a plan proposed last year by Mr. Warner and Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, independent of Connecticut.

The measure would reduce American production of climate-altering gases by nearly 70 percent from current levels by 2050. It would provide billions of dollars in subsidies for energy conservation and environmentally clean technologies, creating millions of jobs, proponents say.

The sale of the permits would raise more than \$5 trillion for the government in the coming decades, money that the bill proposes to distribute to affected industries, consumers and local governments in one of the biggest programs of redistribution of American wealth in history. The bill’s proponents say the money would help pay for a technological leap that would create millions of new jobs while cleaning the atmosphere.

Given the timing and the range of opposition, it appears unlikely that the bill will pass the Senate. (Similar efforts are under way in the House.) President Bush has stated opposition to the mandatory emissions limits and numerous other provisions.

But history shows that far-reaching environmental legislation often gets off to a slow start, then passes both houses of Congress and is signed into law when the political time is ripe. “If we get a majority or even close, we will be that much closer to addressing global warming and passing legislation in the next Congress, whoever the president is,” said David Doniger, director of climate policy at the Natural Resources Defense Council. “We may not get it done this year, but if not we start next year just a few steps from the finish line.”

Senator Bob Corker, a freshman Republican from Tennessee, said in an interview that he favored a cap-and-trade program in theory but found serious flaws in the bill. He will be among those seeking to derail it.

“This bill is not going to become law,” Mr. Corker said. “It has no chance, none.”

Mr. Corker is proposing a string of amendments that Democrats characterize as “poison pills” that would undermine the purpose of the legislation. His amendments would return more of the receipts from the carbon permits directly to taxpayers, eliminate the issuance of free permits and do away with the ability of American companies to meet their emissions targets by buying offsets overseas.

One of the major points of contention arises from the bill’s treatment of goods from developing countries that are among the world’s biggest carbon emitters, including China, India, Brazil and Mexico.

The measure directs the president to negotiate agreements with those countries to ensure they are imposing binding limits on carbon emissions on their own industries. If they fail to do so, the United States will impose unspecified tariffs on carbon-intensive products like steel, paper, concrete and glass from those countries. The provision was included at the behest of labor unions and American companies in those industries who would not support the bill without such a cost equalizer.

In a speech on global warming in mid-May, Mr. McCain endorsed a similar carbon tariff, then backed away from it because of objections from the free-trade wing of the Republican Party. Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Obama, courting labor support, favor tough carbon-based tariffs.

Frank Ackerman, an economist at the Global Development and Environment Institute at Tufts University, said that the nation had lost crucial time in not addressing climate change and that other nations were bypassing the United States in the development of alternative energy technologies. Mr. Ackerman acknowledged that the conversion to a low-carbon economy will be costly for many industries and consumers, but said that the cost of inaction is many times greater.

“How do you price the increased deaths, the losses of endangered species and unique habitats, the increased damages from hurricanes that are becoming more intense?” he asked. “Those numbers dwarf any

reasonable estimate of the cost of doing something about climate change. The choice is a no-brainer.”