

WASHINGTON - Midlands House members were unanimous Friday night in opposing the climate change legislation approved by the U.S. House of Representatives.

The bill aims to get a handle on the country's emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, but critics say the measure will increase energy costs without much benefit.

"This is a bad investment," said Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb.

Businesses will be allowed to continue emitting greenhouse gases but will be required to purchase allowances from the government, an arrangement Terry described as extortion.

"Tony Soprano would be proud," Terry said.

The bill's backers tried to make it more agriculture friendly by including a key protection for ethanol and giving a greater role to the Agriculture Department.

But Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, said the agriculture provisions represented nothing more than a fig leaf.

"You cannot increase costs to a business and tell them they're going to be more profitable," King said.

King called the bill "the most colossal mistake in the history of this Congress."

He said that no one in Congress can explain, much less defend, the science behind climate change and that the emission reductions included in the bill will have little effect.

"It's ridiculous to think that you can set the earth's temperature by reducing the annual emissions that's such a tiny little part of our overall atmosphere," King said.

Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb., said the bill would mean billions for Wall Street at the expense of electric utility ratepayers.

"It creates intentionally an increased cost of electricity and energy in general that I don't think our economy can afford," Smith said.

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., said the "cap-and-trade" system may have theoretical merit, but there are concerns about its practical application.

"I fear the bill may not effectively reduce emissions and could significantly weaken our nation's manufacturing and agricultural sectors," he said.

The House vote was 219-212, with Republicans overwhelmingly against the measure and 44 Democrats joining them. Eight Republicans voted with the Democratic majority.

At the White House, President Barack Obama said the bill would create jobs, and he added that with its vote, the House had put America on a path toward leading the way to "creating a 21st century global economy."

The measure faces an uncertain fate in the Senate, where Majority Leader Harry Reid issued a cautiously worded statement. "The bill is not perfect," he said, but rather "a good product" for the Senate to begin working on.

The legislation would require the U.S. to reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020 and by about 80 percent by midcentury.

One of the biggest compromises involved the near total elimination of an administration plan to sell pollution permits and raise more than \$600 billion over a decade -- money to finance continuation of a middle class tax cut. About 85 percent of the permits are to be given away rather than sold, a concession to energy companies and their allies in the House -- and even that is uncertain to survive in the Senate.

The final bill also contained concessions to satisfy farm-state lawmakers, ethanol producers, hydroelectric advocates, the nuclear industry and others, some of them added so late that they were not made public until 3 a.m. Friday.

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