

WASHINGTON -- David Sokol told a congressional committee Tuesday that a proposal to fight global climate change will force his company to raise electric rates on customers in Iowa and other states.

"It throws the consumer under the bus," Sokol testified during the Capitol Hill hearing.

Sokol, chairman of Iowa-based MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co., has lobbied for changes in pending legislation to cap the amount of greenhouse gases allowed from major sources such as factories and power plants.

Those facilities and plants also would be required to obtain allowances for each ton of emissions they produce. The bill also sets up a market for trading those allowances.

Sokol doesn't believe the trading portion of the "cap and trade" system is fair. He said utilities can meet the caps in the bill, but should not be required to obtain the allowances.

Sokol was pressed by some members of the committee.

Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash., asked Sokol whether MidAmerican would dump solid waste from its plants onto someone else's property without permission.

When Sokol said no, Inslee suggested Sokol wants to do essentially the same thing by pumping carbon into the atmosphere without paying anything. "Your testimony would suggest that you believe your company has a right to dispose of your gaseous waste in the form of carbon dioxide in an atmosphere which you do not own without charge and without regulation," Inslee said.

Sokol responded that Inslee was wrong, at least about the regulation part. "You're asking us to reduce the amount of (carbon dioxide) and we're saying we'll do that," Sokol said.

Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., who opposes the cap and trade legislation, introduced Sokol at the hearing.

Terry said afterward that Sokol's proposal is unlikely to go far in the House, but could get a better reception by the Senate.

Other witnesses Tuesday included representatives from other utilities, businesses, environmental groups and the Rev. Mari Castellanos, minister of policy advocacy for the United Church of Christ.

Castellanos cited reports that weather-related disasters tied to climate change are taking a toll on people. She said that addressing climate change is a moral issue and cited biblical calls to care for God's creation.

Contact the writer: 202-662-7270, joe.morton@owh.com

