



Friday, October 09, 2009

Embrace Cantwell on climate change

Waxman-Markey Bill is an elaborate and expensive shell game

It is the most enlightened of places, it is the most ignorant of places: This is what an outside observer might conclude after reading two stories this week about the climate positions of two Northwest senators highlighted by the online newspaper Grist.

On the enlightened side is an analysis of new climate legislation being proposed by U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash. It appears at every turn far more effective, fair and intellectually honest than the convoluted and compromised Waxman-Markey bill passed by the U.S. House earlier this year. Quoting Grist, "Cantwell's Carbon Limits and Energy for America's Renewal (CLEAR) Act of 2009 promises 'simplicity, transparency and equity.' It delivers on all counts."

This is in contrast to the Waxman-Markey bill, which in essence is an elaborate shell game offering horrendously expensive legislative gimmicks to buy off industry special interests. As the Medicare prescription drug legislation did for pharmaceutical companies, Waxman-Markey turns climate change into a new profit stream for carbon-emitting polluters instead of making them change their ways.

"By giving companies essentially free pollution rights, Waxman-Markey, in essence, says that polluters own the sky," David Morris writes in Grist. "By requiring polluters to pay for pollution rights and returning 75 percent of that revenue directly to all on an equal per capita basis, CLEAR says that we all own the sky. The sky is a commons. A discussion about the role of the commons may be one of the most significant outcomes of CLEAR."

For a complete comparison of the Cantwell and Waxman/Markey approaches, see Grist's story at <http://tinyurl.com/y8peofp>.

All this is in sharp contrast to the bone-headed attitudes evidenced by U.S. Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo. Barrasso, a TV-advice doctor turned senator when Craig Thomas died in 2007, is intent on putting his state's coal industry ahead of either climate science or national security.

Barrasso is trying to block funds for the Center on Climate Change and National Security, which is being set up to respond to what top intelligence experts say is among the gravest threats to America. Increasing drought, crop failures, destructive storms and other climate impacts are expected to create

massive refugee crises and regional wars as the century wears on. We will inevitably pay a huge cost for this chaos.

Barrasso makes the absurd argument that preparing the nation to confront all this will somehow distract the CIA from watching for terrorists in Afghanistan.

In reality, he is of course merely playing the same out-of-tune fiddle as his fellow Wyomingite Dick Cheney. Both are part of the cynical cabal that wants to put off reckoning with climate change for as long as possible, merely to perpetuate the profits of key campaign contributors. It is shameful.

National climate legislation is languishing, partly because of competing worries like the economy and partly because Waxman-Markey generates no enthusiasm. The Senate should embrace Cantwell's ideas immediately and leave Barrasso and his ilk to choke in the dust.