

The environmental community has been understandably excited about the prospect of finally getting U.S. legislative action in light of the popularity of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, the development of a public consensus on the reality of global warming, the election of Barack Obama, and strong Democratic majorities in both House and Senate. That optimism, however, may be premature.

Al Gore reportedly was warmly received by the Senate on Wednesday (see [this story](#) in the San Jose Mercury News), with even some Republicans saying they expect a cap-and-trade bill to pass this year. But Democrats remain divided on climate change legislation. Although California's Henry Waxman has taken the gavel of the House Energy and Commerce Committee from John Dingell, Democratic legislators from coal-dependent midwestern states are still pushing a go-slow approach (as described [here](#) in the New York Times). Nancy Pelosi said before the inauguration that she would not bring climate legislation to the floor this year because of doubts about its prospects (she is now slightly more optimistic, [hoping for a vote](#) before December). And last week the Pew Research Center [reported](#) that in a poll asking respondents to rate relative priorities among 20 issues global warming now ranks dead last. Environmental protection is slightly higher on the list, but has slipped sharply from last year.

The bottom line: while federal action on climate change is surely closer to reality than it was before the November election, passage of a strong climate bill this year is still a long shot. For the time being, leading states may still be the best-positioned players to push greenhouse gas regulation forward. At least their progress is no longer being actively opposed by the federal executive branch.