

I posted yesterday about Rep. Boehner's bone-headed statement about climate change. My first thought was that this was completely idiotic, making a childish argument that even George W. Bush would have scorned. The fact that some CO₂ is normal and even necessary proves nothing about what happens when concentrations go beyond the normal level: salt is essential in small doses but you'd die of thirst drinking sea water. Even apart from the demonstration of abysmal ignorance of climate science, there's the fact that cows emit methane, not CO₂, when they "do what cows do," and that no one thinks CO₂ is a carcinogen anyway.

My second thought, however, is that this is an outburst from someone who expects to lose on an issue and therefore sees no point in taking a responsible position. Maybe - just maybe - Boehner realizes that this train has already left the station.

The Waxman-Markey bill may be that train. The sponsors seem to have recruited a broad range of supporters, going well beyond the "usual suspects" among environmentalists.

Take a look, for example, at some of the witnesses scheduled for Thursday:

Panel 1 Allocation Policies to Help Consumers * Jeff Sterba, Chairman and CEO, PNM Resources Inc. (on behalf of the Edison Electric Institute) * John Somerhalder, II, Chairman, CEO, and President, AGL Resources (on behalf of the American Gas Association) * Richard Morgan, Commissioner, District of Columbia Public Service Commission (on behalf of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners)

Panel 2 Ensuring U.S. Competitiveness and International Participation * Rich Wells, Vice President for Energy, The Dow Chemical Company * Jack McMackin, Principal, Williams and Jensen, LLC (on behalf of the Energy Intensive Manufacturers Working Group on Greenhouse Gas Regulation) * Pastor Doug Smith, Virginia Interfaith Society for Public Policy

Panel 3 Low Carbon Electricity, Carbon Capture and Storage, Renewables, and Grid Modernization * Dan Reicher, Director of Climate Change and Energy Initiatives, Google, Inc. * Jim Robo, President and Chief Operating Officer, FPL Group * Dr. Gregory Kunkel, Vice President for Environment Affairs, Tenaska, Inc. * Eugene Trisko (on behalf of the United Mine Workers of America)

In addition to various representatives of state and federal governments and NGOs, what you're seeing here is wide support from key economic sectors. Obviously, there will also be opposition from some major corporations, but certainly not a united front from business. A knock-down battle against climate legislation makes little sense for business, since the alternative is for EPA to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act.

Passing climate legislation will not be simple. There are a lot of moving parts: setting the cap, allocating permits, defining the role of the state governments, authorizing or restricting offsets, providing for possible price spikes - and those are just the big and obvious ones.

And there is definitely a core of the Republican Party represented by Boehner that just wishes the climate issue would go away. But it looks increasingly likely that Congress will act, and perhaps sooner than we had thought.