

S.Res.30: A Critical First Step to Solving Climate Change

Summary

S.Res.30 was introduced by Senator Biden, on January 16, 2007 and originally co-sponsored by Senators Lugar, Bingaman, Boxer, Feingold, Lieberman and Snowe. The resolution calls for U.S. participation in negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), leading to agreements that will commit all nations – developed and developing – that are major emitters of greenhouse gases to achieve significant long-term reductions in those emissions. The resolution, which also calls for a bipartisan Senate observer group to monitor these negotiations, was reported out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee without objection on March 29, 2007.

S.Res.30:

A critical first step towards an effective international response to global climate change:

- The U.S. Senate's perceived opposition to U.S. participation in international climate agreements has become an obstacle to the negotiating process.
- The Biden-Lugar resolution removes this obstacle by calling for U.S. participation in negotiations under the UNFCCC, and the exercise of U.S. leadership in other venues in order to "secure[e] United States participation in binding agreements that:
 - Advance and protect the economic and national security interests of the United States
 - Establish mitigation commitments by all countries that are major emitters of greenhouse gases, consistent with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities
 - Establish flexible international mechanisms to minimize the cost of efforts by participating countries
 - Achieve a significant long-term reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions" [S.Res.30]
- S.Res.30 ensures the Senate's ability to exercise its oversight responsibilities in climate negotiations by "establishing a bipartisan Senate observer group to:
 - Monitor any international negotiations on climate change
 - Ensure that the advice and consent function of the Senate is exercised in a manner to facilitate timely consideration of any applicable treaty submitted to the Senate" [S.Res.30]
- "An effective global effort to address climate change must provide for commitments and action by all countries that are major emitters of greenhouse gases, developed and developing alike." [S.Res.30]

Why S.Res.30?

Climate Change poses a real and growing risk to the national and economic security of the United States:

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, representing international scientific consensus, recently concluded that global warming is "unequivocal," and that there is an overwhelming (>90%) likelihood that human activities are responsible for the temperature increase. [IPCC Fourth Assessment]
- Without action, earth's temperature will rise between 2.5 and 4° Celsius over the next century, dwarfing the 0.5° C rise during the 20th century. [IPCC Fourth Assessment]
- This could "create risks of major disruption to economic and social activity... on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century." [Sir Nicholas Stern]

FACT SHEET

- “A 100 billion dollar U.S. mega-catastrophe is getting closer for the insurance industry – and it could hit almost anywhere on the Atlantic coast.” [Lord Levene, Chairman of Lloyd’s of London]

The time for solutions has arrived: “There was a time when we could plead ignorance. That day is past. The science is now clear. There was a time when we might have claimed the cost of changing our ways was too great. That day is past. We now know the costs of inaction are unacceptably high.” [Senator Biden]

There is no time to waste:

- Avoiding a rise in global average temperature larger than 2°C is critical in order to avoid crossing a climate “tipping point” that could lead to uncontrolled warming.
- The window of opportunity in which to curb global greenhouse emissions and avoid the most devastating effects of climate change is rapidly closing.
- “There is still time to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, if we act now and act internationally. But the task is urgent. Delaying action, even by a decade or two, will take us into dangerous territory.” [Sir Nicholas Stern]

The only effective solutions are international solutions: Effective action to prevent climate change requires the participation of all major greenhouse gas emitters, including developing countries. Developing countries’ emissions are growing rapidly, and China is set to pass the U.S. as the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases in 2009 [International Energy Agency].

The U.S. should exercise its leadership in marshalling an effective international response to this historic challenge:

- Climate change cannot be overcome by any one nation alone, and without the U.S. it may not be overcome at all. Without U.S. participation, the effectiveness of international climate change agreements will remain limited.
- U.S. leadership can bring developing country emitters to the table. Without U.S. involvement, these countries are unlikely to agree to limit their emissions.
- “It is now clear that our inaction reduces the effectiveness of international efforts to address climate change, and provides an excuse for China, India, Mexico, Brazil, and other leading emitters of the future to stay with us on the sidelines.” [Senator Biden]
- “It is critical that the international dialogue on climate change and American participation in those discussions move beyond the disputes over the Kyoto Protocols. We need to include India, China and other developing nations in a dynamic dialogue, and recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach is not workable.” [Senator Lugar]
- Active participation in climate negotiations is the best way to ensure that the costs and benefits of stopping global warming are shared equitably

It’s time for the U.S. back in the game:

This is a critical time for climate negotiations. The current international agreement governing greenhouse gas emissions - the Kyoto Protocol - expires in 2012. Negotiations are underway that will determine the shape of future international climate agreements. The U.S. needs to be strongly engaged in these negotiations, but the Senate’s perceived opposition hampers its ability to negotiate successfully. By sending a positive signal to the international community that the U.S. is ready to participate in binding agreements, S.Res.30 strengthens the United States’ ability to negotiate fair and effective agreements.

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