

US: Stalled clean coal plant moving ahead in Ill.

By HENRY C. JACKSON

In the OC Register, Hanford Sentinel, Modesto Bee, June 12, 2009

WASHINGTON - The Department of Energy is moving forward on a futuristic coal-burning power plant in Illinois that the Bush administration had declared dead.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu said Friday that reviving the FutureGen plant is an important step that shows the administration's commitment to carbon-capture technology.

"The FutureGen project holds great promise as a flagship facility to demonstrate carbon capture and storage at commercial scale," Chu said in a statement. "Developing this technology is critically important for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. and around the world."

Negotiations for the FutureGen project have been going on since the Obama administration announced it would consider reviving the project. Under President George W. Bush, the project was canceled after cost overruns that a Congressional auditor later said were based on false projections.

U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., called the plant's revival a "historic moment."

"In my time in Congress, I can't recall a project that has greater scientific and practical significance than FutureGen," Durbin said.

The project is slated to be built in Mattoon, Ill. It has been billed as a potential economic engine for a part of Illinois that has been hit hard by the economic slowdown.

The FutureGen plant is designed to burn coal while capturing and burying its carbon dioxide emissions.

Japan Sets Emissions Targets, and No One Seems Pleased

By Hiroki Tabuchi, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Thursday, June 11, 2009

TOKYO — Japan, a major emitter of greenhouse gases and an important player in the global warming debate, announced Wednesday that by 2020 it intended to reduce emissions 15 percent from 2005 levels — a goal immediately criticized as inadequate by environmentalists and industry officials.

Climate-change campaigners have called on Japan to set steep targets to build momentum before global climate talks this year in Copenhagen. A strong commitment by rich countries is seen as crucial to efforts to persuade emerging economic giants like China and India to make emissions reductions.

Japan's new target, announced by Prime Minister Taro Aso in a televised news conference, would put its 2020 emission levels just 8 percent below its 1990 levels. That is not much more, environmentalists say, than the 6 percent cut by 2012 that Tokyo committed to under the Kyoto Protocol created in 1990. Japan has struggled to meet that target; its greenhouse gas emissions have risen 9 percent from 1990 levels.

Still, Mr. Aso called Japan's new target "ambitious."

"We are all responsible for stopping climate change," Mr. Aso said. "We must ask the Japanese people to make sacrifices. That is the cost of saving our planet."

Mr. Aso has been keen to assert leadership in climate change ahead of national elections this year.

The European Union has promised to cut emissions to a level 20 percent lower than levels in 1990, and by 30 percent if other wealthy nations follow suit.

In the United States, which did not sign the Kyoto pact, a bill that would reduce emissions by 17 percent by 2020 from 2005 levels recently cleared a Congressional panel. That would be about 6 percent below 1990 levels.

Japan emits less relative to its total output than other major economies. Though Japan has the second largest economy, behind the United States, it ranks fifth in global emissions rankings, trailing the United States, China, Russia and India.

But critics say there is more to be done.

"Japan's target is not nearly enough to stop the effects of global warming," said Naoyuki Yamagishi, the head of the climate change program at the environmental advocacy group WWF Japan. "Japan has failed to step up to its international responsibilities," he said.

Kristian Tangen, a director at Point Carbon, a research and consulting company based in Oslo, said Japan's goals were "the weakest target any country has pledged so far."

Japanese businesses argue that their factories are already among the world's most energy-efficient and that the country will struggle to cut greenhouse gas emissions further. Since the oil shocks of the 1970s,

Japanese companies have pursued technologies that save energy, a drive that has made the country a leader in alternative energy.

Industry leaders also warn that stringent targets for emissions reductions would hurt the frail economy. Japan is in its worst recession since World War II, amid a collapse in global demand for its exports. Last month, industry groups took out a full-page advertisement in the largest daily paper in Japan, warning that steep targets for emissions reductions could hurt economic growth.

"The midterm targets need to be fair to all countries, realistic, and place equal burden on a country's citizens," the Keidanren, the largest business lobby in Japan, said in a statement on Tuesday. The lobby had backed a target that would have allowed for a 4 percent increase in emissions from 1990, or a 4 percent decrease compared with 2005.

Mr. Aso was quick to point out that unlike targets set under the Kyoto Protocol, which allowed countries to use emissions offsets and other methods, the 15 percent decrease would come from actual cuts. The government recently introduced subsidies that encourage the use of solar power in Japanese homes, as well as incentives on low-emission cars.

The 15 percent target, he stressed, was a compromise he had reached after consulting extensively with scientists and economists, as well as with members of the public.

To meet the target, Japan will pursue breakthroughs in environmental technology, as well as expand the use of nuclear energy. Mr. Aso has said Tokyo aims to expand solar output by a factor of 20 and put more "green" cars on Japanese roads.

Meanwhile, Mr. Aso said it was imperative for countries that had not signed the Kyoto Protocol, like the United States and China, to join in the next round of talks. The Kyoto pact covered countries responsible for just 29 percent of global emissions, he said.

Tsutomu Toichi, head of the Institute of Energy Economics, an independent research organization, said Japan would struggle to meet its new emissions goals.

"Japan's target is a compromise, but it's still a tough one for Japan to meet," Mr. Toichi said. "Japanese companies are already extremely energy efficient, so there's much less room for improvement."

Makiko Inoue and Yasuko Kamiizumi contributed reporting from Tokyo; James Kanter contributed reporting from Brussels.

UN climate chief confident of global warming pact

By Arthur Max - Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Friday, June 12, 2009

BONN, Germany—U.N. climate delegates completed their first rough sketch of a new global warming agreement Friday, a draft replete with gaps and competing ideas that await decisions by political leaders.

At the end of a two-week negotiating session, the rift lay more clearly exposed between industrial and emerging nations—and within those blocs—on the obligations of the 192 countries involved in the talks to control greenhouse gases blamed for climate change.

The end result, due in six months, will determine the course of development for generations in the economies of rich and poor countries, as well as the planet's health.

Though conceptual issues remained unbridged, officials and environmental activists agreed the negotiations progressed toward drafting the framework for the accord that is due to be completed in December at a major conference in Denmark.

World leaders will meet several times later this year, beginning with a Group of Eight summit in July, with climate change on the agenda.

Yvo de Boer, the top U.N. climate change official, said he was confident of reaching an ambitious agreement in Copenhagen, though it will lack details that will require further work.

The latest round showed that governments "are committed to reaching an agreement, and this is a big achievement," he told reporters.

The draft, which began with 53 pages when this session began June 1, ballooned by Friday to about 200 pages as

delegations inserted language to be negotiated later. The second draft was expected to be whittled down to a more manageable size at the next round of talks in August.

Environmental activists said they were concerned at incremental pace of talks.

"We see no political breakthrough. Instead, delegates are just preparing themselves for battles to be fought at later meetings," said Kim Carstensen of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature. It was helpful to clarify their positions, he said, but "we're losing time."

Scientists say industrialized nations must cut emissions by 25 to 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020 to prevent climate disasters, such as coastal flooding from rising sea levels, severe weather events, and variations in rainfall and temperatures that will affect agriculture and wipe out species of plants and animals.

Pledges from advanced countries fall far short of that range. WWF calculated that the declarations from wealthy countries amounted to a total emissions cut of just 10 percent.

"There is no question that industrialized countries must raise their sights higher," De Boer said.

The talks aim to craft a deal in Copenhagen to succeed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which required 37 industrial countries to cut emissions a total 5 percent from 1990 by 2012. It made no demands on developing countries, and the U.S. refused to sign on to that deal.

Now, the U.S. and the European Union say swiftly developing countries like China, India and Brazil must accept some commitments, although they would be of a different nature and legal force than the commitments of the industrial world.

Jonathan Pershing, the chief U.S. delegate, said that unlike the industrial countries China should not have national caps on its emissions.

Beijing should have binding actions, but not binding outcomes, said Pershing, who broke away from the Bonn talks earlier this week to join a U.S. delegation to Beijing.

"Our expectation of China is that they will take domestic actions that can be measured, quantified and reported," he said. "They will be bound to those actions both domestically and in the international arena. That is not the same thing as saying that those actions have to have an outcome that is binding."

On Thursday, India's chief delegate Shyam Saran said his country rejects any limitations on its development, but is willing to allow outside scrutiny of programs built from international funding and the transfer of technology.

With one-third of its 1.2 billion people lacking electricity, India needed to continue growing, and its historical emissions could not compare to the carbon pumped into the atmosphere over the past 150 years by the industrial West.

Saran rejected any idea of scrapping the Kyoto Protocol, which classifies countries as those with emissions targets and those with no obligations at all.

But that structure was unlikely to remain unchanged in Copenhagen to account for emerging economies that would also include South Korea, Brazil and South Africa.

"The world is a lot different now," said Andrew M. Deutz, of The Nature Conservancy, an advocacy group. "To make decisions you need to have the developing countries at the table, and they are going to have to participate" in the solution, he said.

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary Friday, June 12, 2009](#)

Carbon cap bill's good, and time is short

By Fred Krupp and Peter Darbee

Congress took an important step in the right direction on global warming recently with the approval of a carbon cap bill by a key committee. With the stage now set for a battle in the rest of the House, opponents will no doubt be sharpening their chief attack – the claim that our economy and American consumers can't afford to take real action against climate change. We strongly disagree.

Far from handicapping growth, a well-designed strategy on climate change will do much to help invigorate it.

It's clear today that our country badly needs increased economic investment and new jobs. Yet, right now, some of our nation's largest manufacturing and infrastructure companies are holding back billions of dollars in investments, in part because they would be foolish to gamble on big, long-term financial commitments while the rules for carbon emissions remain in limbo. The same goes for decisions on research and development spending.

Such investments would put Americans to work, support the economic recovery and, most importantly, sow the seeds for homegrown innovation that strengthens U.S. competitiveness.

That's one reason we so strongly support passing a well-designed cap on carbon emissions, and why we believe the legislation now moving forward is a strong start.

The other reason, of course, is the science. With study after study showing that the climate is changing alarmingly fast – faster than anyone predicted – we can no longer duck the need to act. More delay means higher costs down the road, for the environment and, eventually, for the economy. Far cheaper to begin downshifting our carbon output now than to have to slam on the brakes later.

But while it's critical that we start now, it's also critical to start smartly. We agree with those who say it is a bad idea to suddenly saddle consumers with higher energy prices as a byproduct of carbon cap legislation.

Instead, there needs to be a smooth transition for energy consumers.

The good news is that the current bill succeeds on this point.

One key was the decision to protect consumers by giving a portion of the emissions permits under the cap directly to the local utilities that provide their electric and natural gas service.

Some supporters of climate legislation argued that companies should have to buy all of the emissions permits they need through a government auction. We agree that eventually this makes sense. But in the near term, if the idea is that much of the value from emissions permits should go back to American families to reduce costs – a principle we agree with – there are better ways to do that.

Particularly in the early years of the program, giving permits directly to local electric and natural gas utilities for the benefit of customers provides a safeguard against sharp price increases. The reason is that state utility regulators will use their authority to see that any value from the permits goes straight back to electric and gas customers in the form of lower rates or – better yet – direct rebates.

As a result, utility customers will not see sudden and significant increases in their bills. This approach will also help smooth out regional cost disparities stemming from the fact that a carbon price will affect certain areas of the country differently depending on the types of fuel used to generate electricity there.

Some advocates for an auction will continue to say it is better to allow electric and gas consumers to experience the sticker shock of higher prices and then relieve the pain through reductions in taxes.

We think that's problematic. First, it's more complicated. Second, we worry that consumers won't make the connection between higher energy prices and lower taxes. The result could be a consumer backlash that threatens to derail climate protection efforts. That's a risk we should avoid.

Wisely, the current bill strikes a careful balance on this issue, ensuring customers are protected and providing a clear path to achieve our environmental goals.

The most important point is this: Contrary to what opponents will claim this summer, now is precisely the right time for Congress to embrace a responsible plan to meet this challenge. While not perfect, the bill approved last week lays out a smart, responsible and sustainable path to start seriously addressing climate change today.

It points the way toward enacting a cap on carbon that protects consumers and the environment, while fortifying America's economic strength and leadership. It's now up to Congress to take the next step and head along the path the recent landmark vote makes possible.