

3 senators join forces to rescue climate bill

Dina Cappiello, Associated Press, 11-5-09

A trio of senators with different political views launched a rescue effort Wednesday for troubled climate legislation.

Sen. John Kerry, Massachusetts Democrat -- together with Sen. Lindsey Graham, South Carolina Republican, and Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, Connecticut independent -- announced that they would work in conjunction with the White House to patch together a bill that could pass the U.S. Senate.

The three senators met individually Wednesday with Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Carol Browner, the president's assistant for energy and climate change.

"Our effort is to try to reach out to broaden the base of support," Mr. Kerry said at an afternoon news conference. "The key here is to really negotiate once, in a sense."

Mr. Graham, who has come under fire in his home state for his support of action on climate change, said working on legislation was a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to solve two problems: heat-trapping carbon dioxide pollution and the country's dependence on foreign sources of fuel.

"If environmental policy is not good business policy, you will not get 60 votes," Mr. Graham warned. "The green economy is coming. We can either follow or lead."

The announcement came as a key Senate panel for a second straight day delayed voting on any changes to a climate and energy bill introduced in late September by Mr. Kerry and Sen. Barbara Boxer, California Democrat, because no Republicans showed up.

Republican lawmakers are demanding a more thorough economic analysis of the measure, which would reduce heat-trapping gases by 83 percent by 2050, saying it will raise energy prices and cause job losses.

But the bill, which would set up a market for pollution permits, also has raised concerns among moderate Democrats, including Sen. Max Baucus, Montana Democrat.

Mr. Kerry, Mr. Graham and Mr. Lieberman stressed Wednesday that their "dual track" for climate legislation would not usurp Mrs. Boxer's efforts or the work of five other committees that have jurisdiction over energy and climate policy. They also said they had the blessing of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Nevada Democrat.

Instead, they said they would take the best pieces of the Kerry-Boxer bill and try to broaden support by adding more incentives for nuclear power and offshore drilling that could bring some Republicans and moderate Democrats on board.

Tony Kreindler, a spokesman for the Environmental Defense Fund, said the three senators "have given a new life to a bipartisan process."

Left unanswered was how long the new process would take. Mr. Kerry said he would not be bound by a specific time frame. But with a month left until 192 nations gather in Copenhagen to hammer out a new international

treaty to slow global warming, the Obama administration and Democrats are under pressure to show movement on a climate bill.

The House passed its version of the bill in June.

"This is the year that we've got to reach out to each other and get the 60 votes to get something done," Mr. Lieberman said. He co-authored a global-warming bill last year along with former Sen. John W. Warner, Virginia Democrat, and Mrs. Boxer. The measure failed to get enough votes to advance on the Senate floor.