

Bush Faces Dissent From Republicans on Climate Change (Update1)

April 24 (Bloomberg) -- Representative Bob Inglis, a South Carolina Republican, says he "pooh-poohed" global warming until he trekked to the South Pole in January.

"Now, I think we should be concerned," says Inglis, who heads the U.S. House Science Research subcommittee. "There are more and more Republicans willing to stop laughing at climate change who are ready to get serious about reclaiming their heritage as conservationists."

U.S. companies including General Electric Co. and Duke Energy Corp. have come out in support of national limits on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse-gas emissions that scientists say contribute to global warming. They are now being joined by Republican lawmakers who have parted company with President George W. Bush on the issue.

"As the evidence of global warming becomes undeniable, momentum is building to take action to cut greenhouse gas emissions," former Vice President Al Gore said in an e-mail. "A lot of elected officials who used to reflexively oppose action on global warming have begun to change their positions."

In addition to Inglis, who says he saw evidence of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere during his trip to Antarctica that confirmed his growing concern, the list of Republicans paying more attention to global warming includes Senators Pete Domenici of New Mexico, the chairman of the chamber's Energy Committee; Mike DeWine of Ohio; and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, as well as Representative Jim Leach of Iowa.

'Resistance Crumbling'

"Resistance to action on climate change is crumbling," says Reid Detton, an Energy Department official under former President George H.W. Bush who is now head of energy and climate at the United Nations Foundation. "The business community has a number of prominent leaders arguing for action, and the science on climate change becomes

clearer and more inescapable by the day."

Republicans also are under pressure from one of their core constituencies: fundamentalist Christians. In February, 86 evangelical leaders called on the government to curb greenhouse gases emitted by cars, power plants and other sources, saying they felt a moral duty to speak out because global warming is endangering the earth.

"A lot has changed in the last year, largely because of a grassroots movement of people who for varied and sundry reasons care about this cause," says the Reverend Richard Cizik, vice president for governmental affairs at the National Association of Evangelicals, a Colorado Springs, Colorado-based group that represents 30 million Christians. "There's no safe ground anymore for Republicans to ignore this issue or call it a hoax."

Fresh Hope

The shift has given fresh hope to lawmakers such as Senators John McCain, an Arizona Republican, and Joseph Lieberman, a Connecticut Democrat, who are co-sponsors of legislation to limit carbon emissions. McCain is expected to push for another Senate vote on the measure this year and says he's prepared to make climate change a campaign issue if he runs for president in 2008.

McCain says he and his allies "will make the Senate keep on voting and voting and voting" and, in time, "we will win."

The measure has twice failed to pass the Senate and, along with other climate-change legislation, lacks support in the House of Representatives. Still, many companies say they think it's just a matter of time before Congress approves a carbon cap.

"Two years ago, we weren't talking about it; it's a dramatic change," John Krenicki, head of Atlanta-based GE Energy, a unit of Fairfield, Connecticut-based General Electric, said in an interview. He predicts that a greenhouse gas limit will be in place in less than five years.

Welcome Regulation

GE Energy, the world's biggest maker of power-plant equipment, and Charlotte, North Carolina-based Duke Energy, the largest U.S. utility owner, are among companies that told the Senate Energy Committee earlier this month they welcome carbon regulation.

The companies say they want certainty before making billions of dollars in investments in ``clean" technologies. They also are wary of having to deal with a hodgepodge of state standards.

``It's a nightmare for any business," says Christine Todd Whitman, head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency during President George W. Bush's first term. ``We need one standard nationally."

GE and other companies also face carbon restrictions in Europe, Japan, Canada and other countries participating in the Kyoto Protocol that restricts carbon emissions from cars, power plants and other sources. Bush rejected the accord in 2001 because of concern that it would make U.S. businesses less competitive.

Voluntary Approach

Instead, Bush has called on companies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions voluntarily. His top adviser on climate change, White House Council on Environmental Quality Chairman James Connaughton, says the president also supports some mandatory policies that would reduce carbon emissions, including new fuel-economy standards and a requirement for more ethanol in gasoline.

Connaughton says activists merely are annoyed that Bush isn't talking nonstop about climate change. ``We don't need to say it three times in the same 15-minute speech," he said in an interview.

Inglis insists more is needed and is drafting legislation that would make Bush's greenhouse-gas limits mandatory.

Gore, who has campaigned about the need to act against climate change for decades, says Republican support is critical.

``It may fall to us as Democrats to push the political consensus across the tipping point and I hope we will, but we need to bring Republicans along with us," Gore said at an April 10 Democratic fundraiser in New York.

'We Beg to Differ'

Gore wants to persuade more Republicans and the general public about the dangers of climate change next month when Viacom Inc.'s Paramount Pictures releases ``An Inconvenient Truth," a documentary about his campaign to get Americans to take global warming seriously.

Not all Republicans are convinced. Senator James Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican who in 2003 called man-made global warming a "hoax," still opposes mandatory emission limits and says they could result in lost jobs and higher energy prices. "To those out there saying a federal carbon cap is inevitable, we beg to differ," says Bill Holbrook, a spokesman for Inhofe, who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Nevertheless, Whitman says the time for legislative action may be right because "being seen as against doing something on climate change isn't a place Republicans want to be."

Last month, an ABC News-Time magazine-Stanford University poll showed 85 percent of Americans believe global warming probably is occurring, up from 80 percent in 1998.

'Seeing Is Believing'

The change is palpable in the Senate. Graham, who has said in the past that he was "on the fence" about climate-change legislation, became a stronger advocate for taking action after a trip to Alaska in August with McCain and Senators Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, and Hillary Rodham Clinton, a New York Democrat. They heard from Native Alaskans who are experiencing melting permafrost, coastal erosion and other effects of climate change.

"Seeing is believing," says Graham spokesman Kevin Bishop. Bishop says Graham believes global warming is a problem that must be addressed, while declining to say if Graham would support specific legislation such as the McCain-Lieberman measure.

"When you have the overwhelming evidence from eminent scientists on one side, and a few skeptics on the other, we are guided by the thoughts of the overwhelming, not the few," says Representative Sherwood Boehlert of New York, who heads the House Science Committee.

To contact the reporter on this story: Kim Chipman in Washington at kchipman@bloomberg.net

Last Updated: April 24, 2006 08:11 EDT

 **Print**