

The New York Times

Green

A Blog About Energy and the Environment

JUNE 9, 2010, 4:44 PM

Energy, Climate Change, but No Cap and Trade

By *JOHN M. BRODER*

The [latest proposal](#) to deal with energy and climate change came on Wednesday from Senator Richard Lugar, a moderate Republican from Indiana. His plan seeks to cut energy usage and greenhouse gas emissions without creating a new market in carbon credits or taking a big bite out of the economy.

The proposal, called the Lugar Practical Energy and Climate Plan, has little chance of passage in the Democratic-dominated Senate.

But Mr. Lugar's more incremental approach is designed to appeal to moderate Republicans and a group of Midwestern Democrats who are nervous about the impact of broad climate change legislation on jobs in states that are heavily dependent on coal and manufacturing.

Joining Mr. Lugar in proposing the new bill was [Senator Lindsey Graham](#), Republican of South Carolina, who spent the better part of the last year working with Senators John F. Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, and Joseph I. Lieberman, independent of Connecticut on a more ambitious [energy measure](#).

He abruptly dropped his sponsorship of their measure in April in an unrelated dispute with Senate leaders and the White House over [immigration policy](#).

The Lugar-Graham plan achieves savings in electricity and oil use by requiring higher mileage for vehicles, greater efficiency in power generation, increased use of alternative fuels and new standards for energy use in buildings.

There is no mandatory reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide and other climate-altering gases like those in the Kerry-Lieberman plan put forward last month.

That bill contains a limited version of cap and trade, a system of setting a limit on carbon dioxide emissions while allowing companies to buy and sell permits to meet it.

Mr. Lugar said on Wednesday that cap and trade systems had failed to achieve the desired reductions while imposing large economic costs. They are also politically counterproductive, he said.

“By placing carbon reductions ahead of solving energy vulnerabilities, the cap and trade bills situate the energy debate on the most controversial and unsustainable political

ground,” he said.

“Energy policy would benefit greatly from something close to a political consensus. The most contradictory outcome would be the imposition of an expensive cap and trade plan by a narrow political margin at a time when the added expense could intensify economic pressures in the United States, thus undercutting the appetite of Americans for any efforts toward carbon reductions.”

The new Lugar proposal would achieve roughly half the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions sought under the Kerry-Lieberman plan and a bill passed by the House a year ago. It falls short of the goal of the Obama administration as well.

Mr. Lugar acknowledged that his bill faced an uphill path but he said he hoped to present an alternative that would achieve significant energy savings and pollution reductions without huge costs to the economy.

He said he had not sought endorsements from fellow senators and had not discussed his plan with industry, environmental or lobbying groups. He said that Senator Lisa Murkowski, Republican of Alaska, had told him she would support it.

Mr. Graham, who appeared with Mr. Lugar to announce the new bill, said he believed the proposal had the best chance of any of several proposals now before the Senate.

“There’s no offshore drilling in it and no cap and trade,” he said. “That’s why I’m with him. This gets the game started.”

Some environmental organizations came out quickly in opposition to the Lugar plan, saying that its emissions reductions were not adequate to address climate change and that it permitted old coal-burning power plants to continue to operate indefinitely.

“This is too little, too late,” said Daniel J. Weiss of the [Center for American Progress](#). He and many other environmental advocates support the Kerry-Lieberman approach.