



October 6, 2009

## Boxer Loses Key Committee Staffer, Cap-And-Trade Expert

By DARREN SAMUELSOHN of [ClimateWire](#)

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee is hemorrhaging staff as it faces a critical test in the coming weeks to pass a comprehensive global warming bill.

One of the country's leading experts on environmental legislation resigned Friday to join U.S. EPA as a senior counsel on climate and air pollution issues.

(pdf)

Joe Goffman joined the EPW Committee last October to work on efforts to pass cap-and-trade legislation, a big boost to Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) considering his work on the subject dating back to the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments.

But for weeks, sources on and off Capitol Hill say that Goffman and another recent hire with experience on climate legislation saw their responsibilities diminish as other, more junior staffers took on more prominent roles in writing the bill.

Several lobbyists -- from both industry and environmental groups -- said they were instructed to contact EPW Committee staff director Bettina Poirier and committee aide Jason Albritton if they had questions or concerns about the proposal.

Neither Goffman nor Boxer's office would comment on the personnel move, leaving some to question why someone with such a high degree of experience would make such a jump during a critical moment in the legislative debate over one of the Obama administration's top agenda items.

"It'd be very odd for the chief health care person to leave the Health Committee or the Finance Committee a couple weeks before they were supposed to mark up their bill," said one Senate Democratic staffer. "That's just strange."

"If you are a Clean Air Act attorney, the best place you can be is on the staff of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee," added another aide who works for a different Democratic lawmaker.

This was Goffman's second stint with the EPW Committee. The Philadelphia native worked there in 1989-90 as the Senate passed the Clean Air Act amendments establishing the world's first cap-and-trade system to control sulfur dioxide pollution from power plants. And he later worked at EPA in the early 1990s as the agency wrote the rules to implement the acid rain provisions of the Clean Air Act.

Most recently, Goffman was legislative director to Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) but was among several staff departures after his boss crossed party lines in 2008 to endorse the presidential campaign of Republican

nominee John McCain.

#### Other departures

Goffman is not the first high-profile staffer to leave the EPW Committee since Boxer took over as chairwoman in January 2007.

Eric Thu, for example, left last month to join Capitol Solutions, a small Washington lobbying shop, after more than three years working as a professional staffer on the committee. Erik Olson quit last November after almost two years as deputy staff director and general counsel. He now works as director of the Pew Charitable Trust's food and consumer product safety program.

Several staff members who had been on the EPW Committee dating back to the tenure of Sen. Jim Jeffords (I-Vt.) in 2001-06 also left after working into the early months of Boxer's tenure, including Mary Francis-Repko, now a top aide to House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), and Michael Goo, who left in September 2007. Goo made a brief stop at the Natural Resources Defense Council and then landed earlier this year with Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), one of the lead co-authors of the House-passed climate bill.

"All of that talent, all that investment, has still found a way to be made useful," said one former committee aide. "But the fact is, EPW needed it too."

E&E spoke with more than a dozen current and former Senate aides for this story but all declined to comment on the record because of the sensitivity of both the staffing and legislative issues.

The staff departures come during a particularly tough stretch for Boxer, the three-term senator who is up for re-election next year. Boxer has repeatedly come under fire from Republicans and some moderate Democrats for how she has handled the drafting of the climate bill.

Several Democratic aides complained last week that they had not been given a chance to review the latest version of Boxer's cap-and-trade bill until Sunday, Sept. 29, just two days before the public introduction. And even then, staffers say they were not allowed to leave the committee room with their own copies of the bill.

Many said their first chance to review the proposal in any meaningful way came when the proposal leaked to the media just before last Wednesday's introduction. And some are questioning whether the small circle of people who worked on the complex bill may be contributing to errors and other inconsistencies in the early draft.

"There's not enough staff capacity to catch all that," said one Senate Democratic aide.

Similar complaints shadowed Boxer during last year's climate debate as she worked with Sen. Lieberman and former Sen. John Warner (R-Va.) on their proposal to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Many moderate Democrats questioned whether Boxer, who took the lead on the proposal as it reached the floor in June 2008, had readied suitable responses to the steady line of Republican attacks that the bill would raise gas and energy prices during a recession.

And some complained that Boxer did not listen to their concerns even after repeated attempts for help from moderate Democrats who represent states with heavy supplies of coal, oil and natural gas.

"This was her path to 60 if there ever was one," said one Senate Democratic aide. "It was pretty clear she wasn't taking the political needs of our bosses very seriously."

This year, Boxer has handed over top billing on the climate legislation to Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) even though it is her staff that took the lead in writing the key pieces of their [bill](#) (pdf). Boxer will remain a central figure as her committee votes on the bill, perhaps as early as this month. And several other top Senate Democrats and their committees are expected to weigh in, including Finance Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Agriculture Chairwoman Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) and Commerce Chairman Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.).

Several sources came to Boxer's defense. They agreed the senator faces the challenge of balancing the demands of her liberal constituents and those of moderate Democrats, who have a much different perspective.

"She's got a hard job," said one staffer. "It's not something that anybody is thinking is easy."

An EPW Committee spokesman yesterday issued a statement that did not directly address the departures of Goffman or other staffers. But he did counter complaints that the committee has not done enough work in communicating with senators and their staff.

"Extensive outreach to members has been central to the bill writing process," the spokesman said. "Members and staff from both parties have been directly involved."

The spokesman said a "large number" of committee comments that came in during mid-September were added to the legislation. EPA also pitched in to the bill. And similar efforts are ongoing as Boxer prepares her own changes.

"We have received many positive comments on the bill, but there is work to be done as we do all we can to contribute to progress in the Senate," the spokesman said.

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