

Executives urge lawmakers to pass climate bill

WASHINGTON (The Associated Press) - Oct 7 - By H. JOSEF HEBERT Associated Press Writer

Executives from about 150 companies, many involved in renewable energy technologies, heard a pep talk at the White House and then combed the halls of Congress on Wednesday to argue for passage of a climate bill that is facing an uphill fight in the Senate.

The executives in scores of meetings with senators and their staffs sought to counter opponents' arguments that the climate bill, which will force a shift away from fossil fuels, also will lead to much higher energy prices and cost American jobs.

The business executives from more than 30 states argued that climate legislation and a shift of energy priorities away from fossil fuels could lead to a new industrial revolution and create 1.7 million jobs related to clean energy technologies - from developing new batteries to building windmills and the next generation of solar panels.

The climate legislation is needed to create markets and jobs, said John Doerr, a partner in Kleiner Perkins Caulfield & Byers, a leading venture capital firm on Wall Street. Otherwise, he cautioned, these technologies will be developed and commercially produced elsewhere and "we will be working for the Chinese."

The executives said they wanted to bring a message to senators: that the successes of their companies shows the viability of the clean energy development and that limits on greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels, will lead to the creation of new companies and industries.

But, they argued, without action in Congress, these same technologies will be produced elsewhere, likely in China.

"That's the issue, jobs. What's at question is who's going to build the batteries and who's going to get the jobs," said David Vieau, president of A123Systems Inc., a Massachusetts-based company that makes high-power lithium ion batteries for hybrid cars and other uses.

"If we don't act (on climate legislation) it's absolutely certain we're going to get a minimal piece of that pie."

The same theme was heard earlier in the day as the executives gathered at the White House to hear from Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Commerce Secretary Gary Locke.

Chu said that the need to shift away from fossil fuels is recognized by other countries, including China which, he said, is surpassing the United States in the area of high-tech manufacturing and "making tremendous investments" in clean energy technologies.

If Congress doesn't act on climate change "we will lose an opportunity to lead in this next industrial revolution," said Chu, urging the executives to convince some senators who are "on the fence that it is worth it."

The business community has been sharply divided on the cap and trade climate bills before Congress. In recent months the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which has been critical of the legislation, has seen a number of companies resign their membership over the climate issue.

A House-passed climate bill, and a Democratic version recently introduced in the Senate would limit, or cap, carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions from power and industrial plants so that pollution is reduced over the next four decades by 80 percent. The government would issue emission allowances that companies in turn could buy or sell, depending on whether they are meeting the cap requirements.