

Karen Telleen-Lawton » Serendipity: Sweeping Progress on Climate Change

## Serendipity: Sweeping Progress on Climate Change

We may be on the road to resolution with historic legislation aimed at reducing global-warming emissions

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | Published on 07.04.2009

Aren't you astounded by the sweeping history-making events transpiring in less than a year? We have witnessed a [Depression](#)-like recession, the election of the [nation's first black president](#), and diligent action on issues from health care to Palestine/Israel to climate change. No one will be able to say Americans haven't been interested and involved in their self-governance, which is itself a major miracle. The most far-reaching issue of them all, in terms of effect across time and earth-space, is climate change.

It's difficult to keep up with the recent developments confronting climate change, both regulatory and legislative. The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) announced a historic decision on April 17, ruling that global-warming pollution "endangers" Americans' health and well-being. The agency is already working on national emission standards for manufacturers of the largest sources of global warming: cars and coal-fired plants.



Meanwhile, congressional action has taken center stage. The [American Clean Energy and Security Act](#), which won narrow approval by the [House of Representatives](#) on June 26, is a strong bill aimed at reducing global-warming emissions 83 percent by 2050. That is an amount that scientists believe would significantly reduce the threats of global warming, combined with efforts by other countries.

Now the bill will be shuttled through the [Senate](#) and its own peculiar labyrinth of committees. The amazing thing is, faced with the largest "free-rider" problem of our time, we may be on the road to resolution. How is this possible? I believe it's

the increasing preponderance of scientific evidence combined with a new political will and a workable, though imperfect, bill.

The science has been aggregated since the last century by the [U.S. Global Change Research Program](#), mandated by Congress in the [Global Change Research Act of 1990](#). In its most recent report, released this month ([click here](#)), the USGCRP summarizes the evidence:

- » Climate changes are under way in the United States and are projected to grow.
- » Crop and livestock production will be increasingly challenged.
- » Threats to human health will increase.

Perhaps those stark statements are why the bill has a broad and growing base of support. Labor, environmental and community groups are on board, as well as the business community, energy companies and even many electric utilities. Their support is essential, even if it comes at the cost of a stronger bill.

There are, naturally, foot-draggers. You can't really blame the coal industry for trying; half of the nation's energy still comes from "cheap" coal. But it's only cheap as long as you don't count all the costs in terms of impaired human health care, destroyed environments and CO<sub>2</sub> out the kazoo. The coal lobbies changed tactics and combined forces to become the [American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity](#). They have been successful at slipping in billions of dollars for research. ([Click here](#) to read my column, "Stripping Away Carbon Myths.")

Despite this type of inevitable muddying of the water, the bill represents strong progress. The [Environmental Defense Fund](#) commends its "proven policy approach — cap-and-trade — that sets a declining cap on global-warming pollution and creates a market that rewards innovation to clean-energy technologies. This same approach has dramatically reduced acid rain pollution at a fraction of the estimated costs."

If some form of this legislation makes it to law, you may not feel the effect right away. In fact, the point would be not to notice an effect at all — to be able to continue on our (new) ways without having to face how bad it could have been.

It's hard to put a price on risks averted, but we can be proud of our part as willing cleaners in the sweep of history.

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations supporting sustainability. Graze her writing and excerpts from Canyon Voices: The Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon at [www.CanyonVoices.com](http://www.CanyonVoices.com).*