



## US Senate to Consider 'Green New Deal'

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February 24, 2019

In coming days, the U.S. Senate is expected to consider the Green New Deal, the most ambitious and sweeping measure to combat climate change ever put before Congress, as Republicans push to vote on a proposal they oppose but believe will split Democrats and make them vulnerable ahead of the 2020 elections.

A non-binding resolution introduced earlier this month, the New Green Deal aims to rapidly forge a carbon emissions-free economy while fighting economic and racial inequality. It calls for a 10-year "national mobilization" to remake power production, transportation, manufacturing and farming. It also sets forth wide-ranging guarantees for worker retraining, higher education, health care, and retirement benefits, with special emphasis on disadvantaged sectors and those currently facing risks from a warming planet.

"We choose to assert ourselves as a global leader in transitioning to 100 percent renewable energy," New York Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said at a recent news conference outside the Capitol. "We should do it because we should lead. We should do it because we are an example to the world."

"We will save all of creation by engaging in massive job creation," Democratic Sen. Edward Markey of Massachusetts said. "When we talk about a Green New Deal, we are talking about jobs and justice."

Republicans have a different take on the resolution.

"This Green New Deal is nothing more than a socialist agenda disguised as feel-good environmental policy," Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn said. "This is, in reality, a new entitlement program on steroids."

Noting an estimated price tag in the trillions of dollars and the many promises the measure makes to multiple constituencies, Cornyn added, "They [proponents] might have thrown in free beer and pizza, too."

Another Republican, Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, labelled the Green New Deal "a raw deal for the American public."

Barrasso said, "This is just so extreme, way out of the mainstream of the American public, to the point that it is scary."

But it is Republicans, not Democrats, who are pressing for a vote. Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California pointedly declined to endorse the Green New Deal at a recent news conference, saying, "There are all kinds of ideas coming forward" but stressing that a "well-defined approach" is needed "to make a difference."

By contrast, the Senate's Republican majority leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, could barely suppress a smile when announcing a vote on a measure his entire caucus opposes.

"I've noted with great interest the Green New Deal. And we're going to be voting on that in the Senate and give everybody an opportunity to go on record and see how they feel about the Green New Deal," McConnell recently told reporters.

Climate change activists said they are energized.

"I'm excited," Ben Beachy, director of the Sierra Club's living economy program, told VOA. "It [Green New Deal] is a bold program to transition from an economy of low wages and climate pollution to one driven by dignified work and 100 percent clean energy for all."

Some Democrats, meanwhile, are feeling the pressure. California Sen. Dianne Feinstein drew criticism on social media for her response to a youth group that urged her to vote in favor of the Green New Deal.

"It [carbon emissions] is not going to get turned around in 10 years [as the resolution mandates]," Feinstein said. "I've been doing this for 30 years. I know what I'm doing."

But if Republicans believe they have set a trap for Democrats, Senate Democrats are determined to fight back when floor debate on climate change begins.

"Go for it. Bring it on," Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said in response to McConnell's vote announcement. "I challenge Leader McConnell to say that our climate change crisis is real, that it is caused by humans, and that Congress needs to act."

The forthcoming floor debate likely will expose divisions among Democrats on how to respond to climate change. But Democrats predicted Republicans will be even more exposed.

"We [Democrats] have never been more fired up," Hawaii Sen. Brian Schatz said. "We're going to take this opportunity to have a real debate about climate, because Republicans do not have a plan to address climate change."

Proponents don't deny the Green New Deal is strong medicine, insisting the time for half-measures is over.

"Climate change isn't far-off and hypothetical. It's here and now," Beachy said. "Just last year, direct impacts from climate change in the United States killed hundreds of people and cost the U.S. economy billions of dollars. So it's already here and it's only going to get worse unless we act at the scale and speed that justice and science and demand."

Critics see the resolution as a costly economic disaster in the making.

"It would be a central planning, one-size-fits-all solution from Washington," Cato Institute economist Chris Edwards told VOA. "While it has nice warm and fuzzy language about helping people, I think some of the top-down proposals would actually end up hurting people."

Edwards noted that the free market is producing more energy efficient automobiles and appliances than existed a generation ago, arguing that a downward trend in energy consumption is already underway without massive governmental intervention.

Where Edwards sees unnecessary and harmful federal meddling, Beachy sees opportunity.

"We have a really big opportunity to renew our neglected infrastructure in this country. And doing so would simultaneously create new jobs, help ensure clean air and water, and tackle climate change," Beachy said.

Polls show Americans increasingly concerned about a warming planet and destructive weather patterns. But that concern has yet to spur substantive congressional action.

"Yes, most Americans think climate change is real, it's a problem," Progressive Policy Institute founder Will Marshall said. "But they also don't really rank it up there with health care, with the economy, with immigration, with issues they think are more pressing priorities for the country. That means that there isn't a movement now to support the most ambitious definitions of what this Green New Deal means."

With Republicans opposed and Democrats divided, the Green New Deal is expected to be soundly defeated in any final Senate vote. Proponents hope, at very least, it serves to advance America's discourse on climate change and what might be done about it.