

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Green New Deal seen as both ambitious and dangerous

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WASHINGTON — The resolution itself is only 14 pages, and it has no price tag, but those pages outline the most ambitious U.S. effort yet to address climate change.

And it's drawing both cheers and jeers.

The Green New Deal resolution, sponsored by newly elected Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-New York, and Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., would serve as a 10-year guide to dramatically transform the \$18 trillion U.S. economy into one that no longer emits greenhouse gasses.

“Climate change and our environmental changes are one of the biggest existential threats to our way of life — not just as a nation but as a world,” Ocasio-Cortez said when she announced the program this month.

Although no one believes it will pass the U.S. House or Senate anytime soon, it has sparked cheers from progressives and earned the support of Democratic presidential candidates Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, Cory Booker of New Jersey, Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Kamala Harris of California.

“Everybody who is following understands this is not going to become a law in the current Congress,” said Frank O'Donnell, retired president of the Clean Air Watch in Washington.

“It's trying to put some meat on some aspirational goals. ... It's valuable in that it is raising some topics that need to be debated if we are really serious on making progress on climate issues.”

The resolution also has drawn fire from conservatives who say its menu of goals are technologically unfeasible in the near future, would cost countless trillions of dollars that would lead to higher taxes on everyone and would expand the authority of the federal government into virtually every aspect of the daily lives of Americans.

An early draft called for an end to air travel, but that was withdrawn. The proposal does call on America to “achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions” during the next 10 years, build tens of thousands of miles of high-speed rail and transform every building in the United States to achieve energy efficiency.

“If this were passed by Congress and signed (into) law, there would be a massive rebellion by the states and businesses,” said Chris Edwards, an economist at the libertarian CATO Institute in Washington.

“I am surprised so many establishment members of Congress have signed on to it, because I think it will come back to haunt them when they run for re-election.”

Some Democrats considering a 2020 White House bid have shied away from endorsing the resolution. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, told reporters last week that while he backs a “green new deal,” he is “not going to take a position on every bill that’s coming out.”

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has given no indication she would allow the resolution to reach the floor, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., may have senators vote on it as a way to force Democrats to publicly announce whether they would support it.

Although there are skeptics on the impact of climate change, most analysts believe the world is gradually warming, and carbon emissions are the major cause.

U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide peaked in 2007 and have been declining in the past few years. But reaching net-zero emissions would require a sweeping transformation in the U.S. economy.

In a report issued last fall, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concluded that in 2016, cars, trucks and planes produced 28.5 percent of the nation’s greenhouse gasses, followed by 28.4 percent for electrical utility plants, 22 percent from industrial facilities and 11 percent from residential and commercial buildings.

“There is a great weight of evidence showing the climate is getting warmer and it is leading to rising sea levels and more serious and violent weather events,” O’Donnell said. “If we don’t get a handle on this, we could have an uglier future. The general trend is quite obvious if you open your eyes and look around.”

The resolution, which is nonbinding and does not require President Donald Trump’s signature, pledges to launch the type of federal mobilization not seen since World War II, when the government borrowed billions of dollars to produce the weapons needed to defeat Nazi Germany and Japan.

The Green New Deal does not spell out how to achieve these goals; it would require lawmakers in the future to pass a series of bills to implement the measure, presumably with wind, solar and renewable energy sources. It suggests neither a tax on carbon emissions nor a transition to nuclear power.

“How do you switch the entire U.S. economy over to non-fossil fuel?” asked Myron Ebell, director of the Center for Energy and Environment at the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute in Washington.

“Is it realistic to do this? Well, no. It’s completely loopy, and even if they pass something, it wouldn’t work.”

The drawbacks are daunting. The resolution calls for more high-speed rail to encourage people to switch from carbon-emitting jets and cars. But just last week, California Gov. Gavin Newsom abandoned a \$77 billion train project linking San Francisco to Los Angeles because of staggering costs and mounting delays.

Nuclear power offers the promise of generating electricity without carbon emissions. But many environmentalists are nervous about nuclear power, warning that nobody has yet settled on a permanent location for storing nuclear waste.

“Wall Street doesn’t invest more in nuclear projects because of huge plant construction cost overruns,” said Dan Weiss, a clean energy consultant in Washington. “These projects routinely miss construction deadlines, too.”

Some conservatives fear the resolution could provide a path to a carbon tax or a cap on the amount of carbon that cars, industrial plants and electrical facilities could emit.

Weiss, who favors either a cap or tax on carbon emissions, said, “The compliance history of nearly every major pollution law taught us that when engineers have firm reduction goals and realistic deadlines, they will achieve them faster and cheaper than their lobbyists claimed.”

Ted Hollingsworth, a Republican lobbyist whose clients include nuclear energy, said supporters are offering their “hopes and dreams in a utopian world in their mind with goals which frankly are not achievable based on the way people live today.”

“On the other hand, aspirations are good and there is a lot science can do and it is doing,” he said. “But the costs of achieving what they are talking about are going to be astronomical.”