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Wilson: Bill didn't go far enough

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LISBON - U.S. Rep. Charles Wilson Jr. was among 44 Democrats who broke ranks and voted against the climate change bill narrowly passed by the Democratic-controlled House on Friday.

Wilson said although he supports the stated purpose of the bill - to reduce greenhouse gases and promote energy independence - "I felt it didn't go far enough to protect energy consumers and industries in my district," according to a news release issued by his office.

The bill, which now goes to the Senate, requires the United States to reduce carbon dioxide and other so-called greenhouse emissions by 17 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by mid-century, through a variety of means, including a carbon tax.

Supporters and opponents agree the result will be higher energy prices but disagreed on the impact on consumers. Critics maintain the bill will result in significant increases in electricity and gasoline prices on households, businesses and other consumers, destroying jobs in the process. Supporters maintain whatever jobs that may be lost will be offset by the creation of new "green" jobs as the nation transitions to renewable energy sources.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates the bill would cost an average household of four \$175 more per year in the form of higher energy bills by 2020. The U.S. EPA estimates the cost to be \$80 to \$110. The conservative Heritage Foundation, however, puts the figure at \$1,870 for a family of four, increasing to \$6,800 by 2035 as automatic restrictions contained in the bill go into affect.

Opponents also contend the bill will exact a bigger price on states such as Ohio, where manufacturing is still a major component of the economy and the majority of electricity is provided by coal-fired plants. Wilson, in his news release, said this was the reason for his opposition.

"I believe that coal must and will play a major role in our nation's transition to energy independence. In Ohio, 86 percent of our electricity comes from coal. And the vast majority of that coal comes from Appalachian Ohio. Because we are located in an area of the country that relies on coal to turn on the lights and heat our homes, Ohio families and her energy intensive industries, like steel, will bear the brunt of the cost from this version of climate legislation," he said.

Wilson indicated he could still support the bill, depending on the version that emerges from the Senate.

The bill comes at a time when support for the climate change agenda appears to be slowing, with a number of experts challenging the premise it is settled science and beyond debate that global warming is occurring and mankind is responsible.

One hundred scientists, professors, meteorologists and geologists signed an open letter to President Obama, telling him "the case for alarm regarding climate change is grossly overstated. Surface temperature changes over the past century have been episodic and modest and there has been no net global warming for over a decade now. After controlling for population growth and property values, there has been no increase in damages from severe weather-related events. The computer models forecasting rapid temperature change abjectly fail to explain recent climate behavior. Mr. President, your characterization of the scientific facts regarding climate change and the degree of certainty informing the scientific debate is simply incorrect."

The letter was published by the libertarian Cato Institute.

Meanwhile, U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma has compiled a list of more than 700 scientists who disagree with the United Nation's 2007 climate summary.

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