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## UC hosts cap-and-trade debate

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- An environmentalist and a global warming skeptic discussed climate change, cap-and-trade legislation and the future of the coal industry Monday evening -- all without yelling and calling each other names.

The event, "Cap and Trade: Its Effects on West Virginia's Economy," produced few fireworks, but provided a calm exchange of views about whether limiting greenhouse emissions will harm or help the Mountain State.

Patrick Michaels of the Cato Institute, a well-known critic of climate science and cap-and-trade proposals, said such legislation would cause energy prices to skyrocket and do little to curb global warming.

David Hawkins of the Natural Resources Defense Council described current bills as a free-market way for the coal industry to survive in a world where carbon dioxide emissions are limited.

"Right now, it doesn't pay to apply carbon capture and storage to a coal-fired power plant, because there is no market for it," Hawkins said.

Michaels said power plants aren't ready to make the kinds of reductions being called for in pending legislation or proposed international agreements.

"No one knows how to do this," he said. "We do not have the technology."

He said even the carbon-capture technology that does exist is very expensive, greatly increased electric bills, and makes power plants much less efficient.

Hawkins said, that's because without binding limits on greenhouse gases, utilities and others in the marketplace have no reason to spend money developing such technology -- let alone improving it and installing it on plants.

"It's going to go nowhere unless we have this market-based incentive to make these investments happen," said Hawkins.

Michaels responded, "It's a signal to the private sector to put these coal companies out of business unless they figure out how to capture their carbon dioxide."

Hawkins and Michaels politely debated the issues for about 90 minutes Monday at the University of Charleston. About 250 turned out for the event, sponsored by the Charleston Rotary Club, The Charleston Gazette and the Charleston Daily Mail. UC President Ed Welch moderated.

The conversation took place as delegates from around the world gathered in Copenhagen to discuss a potential global accord for dealing with climate change and as the Obama administration moved a step closer to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulation of greenhouse emissions.

A cap-and-trade climate bill passed the House earlier this year and a similar measure was approved by a Senate committee and is awaiting Senate floor debate.

In general, both bills would set a cap that reduces allowable carbon dioxide emissions by about 80 percent by 2050. Both bills also set up a "trading" system that allows companies to buy, sell and

trade permits for those emissions.

Hawkins said such a system worked well for controlling sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants, and would allow utilities more flexibility to meet carbon dioxide caps more cheaply.

But without providing many details, Michaels argued that cap-and-trade legislation is a "futile attempt to do anything about planetary warming." At the same time, he argued that "climate change is a relatively modest issue" not worth making major economic changes to address.

In climate-change circles, Michaels is a well-known skeptic. He previously denied human-induced global warming, but has more recently shifted to downplaying the significance of the problem.

On Monday evening, Michaels urged West Virginians to take a "good close look at the climate data," which he said reveals a much more minor problem than environmental groups would have the public believe.

But Michaels also rejected the premise of several questions that suggested human-caused global warming was either a huge problem or doesn't exist at all.

"I really wish we weren't so polarized," he said. "The truth is really somewhere in the middle."

Michaels also said that the recent hype over stolen e-mails from a major climate science research center do not undercut the totality of the science on the issue.

"They may have some nasty language, but they do not go out and say there's no such thing as global warming," he said.

Hawkins said it's easy for climate skeptics, industry lobbyists or the media to confuse the public when discussing data about global temperature changes, especially those over the last 10 to 12 years.

What that data really show, Hawkins said, is that the 10 warmest years since 1880 have all occurred since 1997. The data show 2008 was the coolest year since 2000 -- a fact climate skeptics jump on -- but it was still the ninth-warmest year on record, Hawkins said.

"We're still high above the norm," Hawkins said, adding that the science supporting action on greenhouse emissions is "very robust."

Hawkins and his organization have been outspoken proponents of cap-and-trade legislation, as well as advocates of not allowing new coal-fired power plants to be built without carbon capture and storage, or CCS, technology.

He said that both the House and Senate versions of cap-and-trade included emissions reduction timelines and research and deployment incentives that were very friendly to the coal industry.

"The bills have been drafted to be very sensitive to the needs of coal-based economies," Hawkins said. "Coal-dependent economies will have time to transition."

But, Hawkins added, coal-state lawmakers have still not generally supported the bills. Continued refusal to do so, Hawkins said, could lead progressive lawmakers to look for another approach.

That's what happened in the mid-1980s, Hawkins said. Congress had put together a new Clean Air Act that contained big incentives for power plants to install scrubbers. The coal industry still opposed the measure, Hawkins said.

The result? When the final bill passed in 1990, it was much tougher on coal.

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