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Democrats consider big gamble on global warming plan

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On the heels of their improbable passage of a massive health care bill, Democrats are weighing an ambitious global warming bill that few lawmakers were even willing to consider just months ago.

"After seeing health care reform pass, it seems to me they can pass any bill they want if they set their minds to it," said Marc Morano, a global warming skeptic and former top aide to Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla.,

Sens. John Kerry, D-Mass., Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., are expected to unveil their bill the week of April 19 in order to coincide with the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., has suggested he'll try to tackle it this year.

"The leader has been wonderfully committed to making this congress the one that finally passes comprehensive energy and climate legislation," Kerry spokeswoman Whitney Smith told the *Washington Examiner*.

But Reid stopped short of promising to bring the bill to the Senate floor. Whether he does so will depend on how much support he can get from within his own caucus, where he will likely meet opposition from lawmakers representing oil and coal producing states as well as tax-averse moderates.

The bill calls for reducing carbon emissions by 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020. The bill aims to draw in moderate Democrats and Republicans by expanding off-shore drilling, nuclear energy and clean-coal initiatives, though on a limited scale.

"What they are doing is really delivering on all the things both sides of the aisle have promised to do and have campaigned to get done," said Tony Kreindler, spokesman for the Environmental Defense Fund. "The chances of us getting a sensible energy bill out of this Congress are as good as they have ever been."

But other believe the bill's passage in the Senate is improbable, if not impossible, this year as 36 Senate seats are up for grabs and polls show the public wants Congress to focus on legislation aimed at creating jobs and economic growth, not global warming. The Kerry-Lieberman-Graham bill would impose some

kind of gasoline tax as well as a cap-and-trade system on electric utilities, which could lead to higher rates.

"The biggest problem is overcoming polling data that show the American public is leery of anything that could be called an energy tax," said Jerry Taylor, an energy policy scholar at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

But health care reform was also unpopular in polls, yet Democrats cobbled together enough support to pass it last month. Moreno, who now runs the Web site Climate Depot, said Democrats may decide it is "now or never" for a climate bill.

"If they fail this year to get any kind of cap and trade system in place, they are looking at years into the political wilderness when it comes to addressing global warming," Morano said. "We are talking about at least four to eight years before they have another real shot at passing this."

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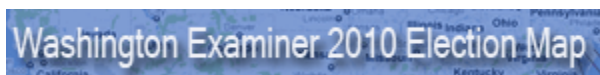
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