



Union of Concerned Scientists  
Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

# backgrounder

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## **UCS Backgrounder**

### **Three Climate Bills Working Their Way through the Senate**

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The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee approved three climate bills in early December that would require federal agencies to: issue regular reports on the effects of global warming in the United States, conduct research on ocean acidification, and develop plans to respond to climate change's unavoidable consequences. Below are some of those bills' highlights.

#### **Climate Change Adaptation Act**

Under this bill, introduced by Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), the president would provide Congress with a five-year plan for reducing the risk global warming poses to federal natural resources. Based on that plan, each federal agency would develop its own plan for addressing climate change. The bill also would direct the federal government to help state and local governments adapt to climate change in their jurisdictions.

In addition, the bill would require the commerce secretary to develop a plan with the appropriate federal, state and local government agencies to reduce risks to ocean and coastal areas. The plan might recommend, for example, modifying federal flood insurance, establishing new zoning rules, and creating easements to move buildings away from the coast. Federal agencies also might be required to produce new flood maps to make property owners aware of the risks.

The legislation would require the president and commerce secretary to update their plans at least every five years.

Under the measure, the federal government would spend \$1.25 billion on adaptation from 2009 to 2013. A significant portion of that money would be used to help states. The funding would have to be approved in an appropriations bill.

Some political analysts believe the bill is an attempt to force the administration to set mandatory global warming pollution limits, because it likely will cost less money to slow climate change than to adapt to it over the long-term.

This bill has three co-sponsors: Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.), Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) and Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.).

#### **Global Change Research Improvement Act**

This bill, introduced by Sen. Kerry, would require the federal government to assess the effects of global warming every five years and identify ways in which it can be slowed.

Since the publication of the U.S. National Assessment in 2001, the federal government has not been systematically providing updated information on U.S. climate change risks and effects. In the absence of these federal assessments, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) has stepped in to fill the gap by publishing a series of reports on the consequences of global warming on particular regions of the country.

Peter Frumhoff, UCS's director of science and policy and chief scientist for the organization's climate campaign, told the Senate committee in mid-November that although UCS has issued several of these reports over the last few years, the organization does not have the resources to continue to shoulder this responsibility.

Under the bill, an independent panel of scientists would review the climate change assessments. And the bill includes a provision forbidding government officials from manipulating or suppressing scientific findings.

This bill has three co-sponsors: Sens. Klobuchar, Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and Bill Nelson (D-Fla.).

### **Federal Ocean Acidification Research and Monitoring Act**

This bill, introduced by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), would require the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to conduct research on ocean acidification. Increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is changing the pH of oceans. If this continues unabated, the increased acidity could start dissolving corals, shell fish and small organisms at the bottom of the food chain.

The NOAA research would provide decision-makers with advanced warnings about the health of these natural resources. Most of the known species of fish and shell fish are concentrated around coral reefs. The risk of loss of the reefs could significantly reduce fish populations, and as a result harm commercial fisheries.

The bill has seven co-sponsors: Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), Cantwell, Kerry, Klobuchar, Nelson and Snowe.

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The Union of Concerned Scientists is the leading science-based nonprofit organization working for a healthy environment and a safer world. Founded in 1969, UCS is headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has offices in Berkeley, California, and Washington, D.C. For more information, go to [www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org).