EPA: Climate Bill To Cost Less Than A Postage Stamp

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WASHINGTON (AP) — A climate and energy bill being pushed in the Senate would cost American households 22 to 40 cents a day — less than the cost of a first-class postage stamp, the Obama administration said Tuesday.

An analysis by the Environmental Protection Agency concluded that the Senate bill, sponsored by Sens. John Kerry, D-Mass., and Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., would cost households an average of $79 to $146 per year. A first-class postage stamp costs 44 cents.

The bill, dubbed the American Power Act, aims to cut emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases by 17 percent by 2020 and by more than 80 percent by 2050. Both goals are achievable under the legislation, the EPA said.

The bill would for the first time set a price on carbon emissions produced by coal-fired power plants and other large polluters. Carbon prices would range from about to $16 to $17 per metric ton in 2013 to about $23 or $24 per ton in 2020, the EPA said.

The EPA analysis came hours before an Oval Office speech by President Barack Obama on efforts to contain the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Obama said the spill was a stark reminder that the days of cheap and easy-to-get oil are numbered, adding that the tragedy unfolding in the Gulf should spark Congress to embrace a "clean energy" future that lessens dependence on oil and other fossil fuels.

Obama hailed a bill passed in the House last year to curb pollution blamed for global warming, but he stopped short of directly calling for the Senate to pass a similar bill. He said he was open to a variety of approaches on energy from either party, as long as they seriously tackle the nation's "addiction" to fossil fuels.

Obama said the one approach he will not accept is inaction.

"We can't afford not to change how we produce and use energy because the long-term costs to our economy, our national security and our environment are far greater," Obama said.

Kerry and Lieberman hailed the 74-page analysis and said it bolstered their case for an all-out push for a comprehensive bill that addresses climate change, rather than a more modest measure focused on the spill, as some lawmakers have advocated.

"The dimensions of the tragedy in the Gulf demand that the president and Congress act boldly to pass legislation that will place a price on carbon which is the only path to reduce our dependence on oil and also create desperately needed clean-energy jobs," Lieberman said.

The climate bill's cost is far outweighed by its benefits, Kerry and Lieberman said.

"There'll be some people who will want to demagogue that politically, but that's less than $1 a day," Lieberman told reporters. "Is the American household willing to pay less than $1 so we don't have to buy oil from foreign countries, so we can create millions of new jobs, so we can clean up our environment? I think the answer is going to be yes."

The Senate bill, which follows a House bill approved last year, includes new protections for offshore drilling as well as incentives for nuclear power and renewable energy such as wind, solar and biomass.

Despite the rosy EPA report, the climate measure faces a steep road in the Senate amid partisan disputes over the drilling provisions and other issues, including immigration reform.

The bill's sole Republican backer, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, withdrew his support last month, saying it is impossible to pass the legislation in the current political climate.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Tuesday before the president's speech that Obama should not use "the justifiable public outrage over an explosion that killed 11 people and the oil spill that followed as a tool for pushing a divisive new climate change policy even as hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil continue to spill into the Gulf each day."

McConnell added, "The wetlands of the Bayou, the beaches of the coast and our waters in the Gulf are far more important than the status of the Democrats' legislative agenda in Washington."

But Kerry said the moment for the climate bill is now. "This isn't a time to tinker around the edges," he said.

Former Vice President Al Gore said Obama was correct to focus on stopping the spill and limiting its impact on the Gulf, but he said comprehensive energy and climate legislation is the best response to the oil disaster.

"Ultimately the only way to prevent this type of tragedy from happening again is to fundamentally change how we power our economy," Gore said. "Placing a limit on global-warming pollution and accelerating the deployment of clean energy technologies is the only truly effective long-term solution to this crisis."

Gore called on the Senate to act, adding: "In the midst of the greatest environmental disaster in the country's history, there is no excuse to do otherwise."

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