

Climate-change bill called threat

Chamber launches campaign to derail it

MIKE DE SOUZA
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

OTTAWA — Canada's largest and most influential business organization has launched a lobbying campaign urging Canadian senators to kill legislation requiring the government to deliver a science-based plan to fight global warming and provide regular reports on its progress.

In a policy alert obtained by Canwest News Service, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce is calling on its members to sign and send a template letter complaining that the Climate Change Accountability Act, Bill C-311, adopted in the House of Commons, is a threat to Canada's economic competitiveness.

"Bill C-311 must die in the Senate," said the chamber in the message to its members. "This will require significant lobbying by Canadian business."

But supporters of the legislation, introduced by NDP MP Bruce Hyer, say the business community is deliberately trying to confuse people about its actual purpose and provisions, noting that its ambitious targets can be modified at the discretion of the environment minister and government.

"I found it pretty shocking," said Graham Saul, executive director of Climate Action Network. "What the chamber of commerce is saying is both uninformed and totally unproductive. The fact that they're trying to kill the only piece of climate legislation on (Parliament) Hill says a lot."

The legislation requires the government to regularly make public reports that measure and review the effectiveness of its policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A previous version of the legislation was also adopted by the House of Commons, but died in the Senate when Prime Minister Stephen Harper called an election in the fall of 2008.

correspond to the targets set by the United States.

Climate scientists have estimated that developed countries need to collectively reduce emissions by 25 to 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020 to ensure that average global temperatures do not rise beyond a tipping point of more than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

The chamber of commerce letter acknowledged that there is an urgent need for action on climate change, but said that an effective plan should instead include massive investments and a sustainable energy strategy to develop new technologies of the future.

"Globally, responding to climate change will take the biggest single investment in the history of humankind," said the letter. "It will be of monumental scale here in Canada, as well. We cannot simply tweak our way to success. And we cannot deal with climate change by eliminating consumption. That is simply not practical. It would cripple the economy, make it impossible to pay for the changes that are needed and destroy public support for strong environmental policies."

In an interview, Perrin Beatty, the president and chief executive officer of the chamber of commerce, said businesses want the 2020 target removed from the bill, even though the legislation allows the government to set its own interim targets toward achieving an 80-per-cent reduction in emissions by 2050. But he said that the 2050 target was "more achievable" and that he'd be willing to look at a revised version of the bill if the 2020 target is changed.

"If it's not meaningful, (the 2020 target) shouldn't be in the bill," said Beatty, a former cabinet minister in the Mulroney government. "If what they're saying is set a target and choose whatever target you want, then take that figure off the bill."

He said that any measures that damage the economy could also damage public support for moving forward.

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Conservatives have always opposed the climate-change legislation.

This time, the chamber of commerce has warned that a recommended target of reducing Canada's emissions by 25 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020 would impose "great costs on the Canadian economy," since it doesn't

live off the bill."

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The president of a coalition of Quebec businesses that has called for ambitious targets in a climate-change plan is also endorsing the chamber of commerce letter.

"It's just a matter of modifying the target," said H el ene Lauzon, president of the Conseil patronal de l'environnement du Qu ebec. "I think the target (in the legislation) is too high."

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