

The Arena

Energy Arena

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Driving the Conversation:

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On climate change, “decisions made now will determine whether we get big changes or small ones.” So said the administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Jane Lubchenco this week.

The Obama Administration had just made public on Tuesday its report on the anticipated impact of global warming across the United States if greenhouse gas emissions are not cut. As summarized by the *Washington Post*: Severe droughts in the Southwest, rainstorms 67 percent heavier in the Northeast compared with 1958, greater heat waves in the South, bugs attacking the nation's crops, sea levels as much as three feet higher that would put a large chunk of southern Florida at risk of flood.

So, as the Waxman-Markey energy and climate bill - the centerpiece of the legislative anti-global warming effort - takes shape, will the decisions being made in the House and Senate lead to “big changes or small ones” in the climate?

Unfortunately, the bill is suffering death by a thousand cuts. Will it be up to the task of making a serious dent in climate change? As the administration's report makes clear, we must begin aggressive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Global warming pollution is cumulative and long-term. So, the sooner we begin to make sharp reductions, the gentler the glide path. Weak standards and free permits to pollute until well beyond 2020 will put off the day of meaningful reductions. That will force even steeper

emissions cuts at a future date to avoid the projected pestilence and floods. And steeper means costlier.

The administration already has authority to act and many opportunities to cut emissions under existing law.

Congress should write a prescription strong enough to deal with the disorder. Otherwise the illness will only get worse, and the price we pay higher.

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