

POLITICAL COMMENTARY FROM THE LA TIMES

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Congress is closed for business this week, shuttered by the heaviest snowfall since

1922. For Libertarians, this might be a dream come true -- no danger of lawmakers enacting new laws that will impose government regulation.

But for one piece of legislation in particular -- the climate-change bill that Democrats assumed they could pass in Barack Obama (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama)'s first year as president -- the snowfall has been a meteorological as well as a political disaster.

Fresh from Republican Scott Brown

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_Brown)'s upset victory in Massachusetts, politicians in both parties deduced that voters saw other issues as more important. Ever since, they've been rearranging their priority list. Think jobs, the economy, government spending.

But the snowfall is also giving skeptics new reason to question the extent of global warming or the urgency of government intervention. Once among the crown jewels of the Democratic reform agenda, cap-and-trade legislation seems as stuck in the snow as a jackknifed truck.

(<http://www.nytimes.com/cwire/2010/02/03/03climatewire-obama-says-senate-may-drop-cap-and-trade-pas-21189.html>)

South Carolina Republican Jim DeMint

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_DeMint) raised the issue on Twitter. Long dismissive of former Vice President Al Gore

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Gore)'s international campaign to combat climate change, DeMint tweeted, "It's going to keep snowing in DC until Al Gore cries 'Uncle.' " (<http://twitter.com/JIMDemint>)

On a more serious note, New Mexico Democrat Jeff Bingaman (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Bingaman) conceded that the blizzards have made climate-change legislation a tough sell. (<http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/80485-climate-bill-buried-under-record-snowfall>)

“It makes it more challenging for folks not taking time to review the scientific arguments,” said Bingaman, chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. “It’s hard to see [how] an economy-wide cap-and-trade [proposal] of the type that passed the House could prevail.”

[Updated at 3:01 p.m.: Environmentalists argue that global warming actually increases the chance for extreme weather because as the planet warms, it can hold more moisture. "Even unusually cold weather in the eastern United States doesn't mean that global warming isn't happening," said Dan Becker of the Safe Climate Campaign at the D.C.-based Center for Auto Safety. "Now, shall we also talk about the dearth of snow for the Vancouver Winter Olympics?"

Still, that hasn't stopped the naysayers

(<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/greenspace/2010/02/snowmagedon-in-washington-spurs-climate-change-doubters.html>) from exploiting their moment in the snow.]

Asked Tuesday about prospects of passing cap-and-trade legislation, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitch_McConnell) burst out laughing, then quipped, "Where's Al Gore when we need him?"

As for me, I'm indoors, looking out my balcony window.

-- Johanna Neuman

Photos: Johanna Neuman

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