

Hagel's other label: Anti-green

By: [Darren Samuelsohn](#)
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Chuck Hagel's battled some ugly labels in recent months, like anti-gay, anti-Israel and anti-nukes. Now he faces another one: anti-green.

The former Republican senator from Nebraska is known in environmental circles as a skeptic on climate change science who played a key role killing the Kyoto Protocol, pulling then-President George W. Bush to the right on greenhouse gases and shepherding energy policies into law that were much less ambitious than what advocates sought.

[\(Also on POLITICO: Joe Biden: Chuck Hagel, John Kerry critics 'ridiculous'\)](#)

Some enviros who backed President Barack Obama say they fear Hagel won't be an advocate for their cause if he ends up leading the Pentagon — a lost opportunity at home and abroad.

Liberals have fought for years to green the Pentagon, because it's the largest consumer of energy within the American government. Abroad, many greens believe the Pentagon could be a force for change as it grapples firsthand with the instability and violence brought on by drought and fierce tropical storms — symptoms scientists attribute to global climate change.

"He definitely played a very nefarious role and ignored the science, which an intelligent person shouldn't do," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign and a former head of the Sierra Club's global warming program. "But the question now is: Fifteen years later, what does he think and what would he do as Obama's secretary of defense?"

[\(PHOTOS: What they're saying about Hagel\)](#)

Obama isn't hiring Hagel to lead the Pentagon because of his views on global warming. But the nomination is still striking, given the president's emphasis on the issue during his second inaugural address and considering the Republican would serve on the national security team opposite incoming Secretary of State John Kerry, who has spent his career trying to save the planet.

Hagel's anti-green label comes from years of examples, greens say.

During Hagel's first Senate campaign in 1996 against then-Gov. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, the Republican slammed President Bill Clinton's EPA and Occupational Safety and Health Administration, calling its workers "a Gestapo."

[\(Also on POLITICO: Chuck Hagel earned more than \\$1M in the past year\)](#)

In his first year in the Senate, Hagel partnered with former Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) on an anti-Kyoto resolution that told Clinton and Vice President Al Gore that the world's first mandatory climate change treaty had no shot at ratification because it gave a free pass to developing countries like China and India.

Kerry and other Democrats were among the 95 senators who voted for the 1997 resolution and have spent years since trying to undo the precedent it created. "I use that so much," Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.), a fierce climate skeptic, said of the Byrd-Hagel resolution.

Andrew Holland, a former Hagel energy and climate aide, said Hagel's work rejecting Kyoto is ideologically consistent with his views on other global issues, including Iran sanctions. "If we don't do it with everyone else around the world, then it doesn't work," Holland said. "It's this multilateral internationalist mind-set."

Hagel's Senate career included a number of other moves aimed at undercutting tougher climate policies.

Soon after Bush was sworn in to the Oval Office, Hagel and three Senate Republicans asked whether he planned to implement a campaign pledge to regulate carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Vice President Dick Cheney's office had signaled the administration wasn't going to follow through with the little-noticed promise, but EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman had done national television interviews offering a different take.

Bush [answered](#) Hagel and the other lawmakers by rejecting his campaign pledge and tossing out Kyoto. The move prompted accusations of a flip-flop from Democrats, greens and foreign leaders. Then-Sen. Jim Jeffords of Vermont later cited Bush's reversal on climate among his reasons for switching parties and depriving the president of a GOP Senate majority.

Hagel also worked with then-Sen. George Voinovich of Ohio to prevent the industry from reporting how much carbon dioxide they release into the atmosphere. And in a 2007 vote in the Foreign Relations Committee, Hagel and Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) were the only opponents to a resolution urging the Bush administration to speed up negotiations on climate, a move then-Chairman Joe Biden hailed as the first proactive step taken in years on the issue.

Becker credited Hagel for agreeing to meet with him in the early 2000s to discuss global warming, but the environmentalist said the message didn't get through. "He was saying things that were just untrue. He was very charming and looked me in the eye and said, 'I'll look into it,' but didn't change his view that global warming was a crock of shit," Becker said.

Hagel allies push back that the senator offered alternatives to overly expensive climate change policies that couldn't accomplish much without action from developing countries. Near the end of his Senate career, Hagel partnered with Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein of California and Dick Durbin of Illinois on legislation that would require the intelligence and military communities to incorporate global warming into their strategic planning.

And while he did lead opposition to a 2005 cap-and-trade bill from McCain and then-Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), Hagel offered a face-saving amendment authorizing the Energy Department to set up a loan guarantee program for low-carbon energy technologies. That language made it into the final energy law that Bush signed, and Obama later seeded the office with stimulus money.

In other words, Hagel can be counted as a godfather of Solyndra, the California solar company that filed for bankruptcy in 2011 despite winning a \$535 million DOE loan guarantee.

"He's the father of successful ones as well," Holland said, noting the original intention of Hagel's amendment was to support the development of new nuclear power plants.

Fast-forward to 2013, and Hagel's supporters say he's grown more in line with Obama's energy agenda. While Hagel hasn't backed cap-and-trade legislation or a replacement for Kyoto, he has put his name on climate in other meaningful ways, including promoting the sharing of low-carbon energy technologies with the likes of China, India and other fast-growing parts of the world.

"Everybody evolves," said retired Air Force Gen. Charles Wald, a former deputy commander of U.S. forces in Europe who traveled with Hagel in 2004 to energy-production hot spots in West Africa.

If confirmed to run the Pentagon, Hagel will face mounting energy challenges — it used 5 billion gallons of fuel in 2011, costing \$13 billion — while dealing with a brutal budget environment and a fast-changing mission away from fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Several policies are already in place to get a grip on energy. Navy Secretary Ray Mabus has pledged to get half of his department's energy from renewables by 2020. Obama in 2010 also installed Sharon Burke, a former Hagel national security and foreign policy speechwriter, into a newly created assistant secretary post in the Pentagon that focuses on the nexus of energy issues and acquisitions, technology and logistics.

"The ethos of energy conservation is deeply embedded at DOD," Clinton-era Defense

Secretary William Cohen said in an email. “Whatever hesitations Sen. Hagel had in the past about climate change, I have no doubt that he will continue the policy that’s been set at the Pentagon and is high on the commander-in-chief’s agenda.”

Wald, head of Deloitte’s Department of Defense practice, said Hagel’s personal views on climate change don’t matter. “I don’t think Hagel is a green proponent as much as he’s going to be an assured-fuel proponent,” he said. “And if it’s clean, all the better.”

In his written answers supplied this week to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Hagel never mentions climate change. But he does walk a careful line on energy that appears designed not to antagonize conservative Republicans who oppose the Pentagon’s recent emphasis on alternative fuels. Hagel called it “prudent” for the military to test whether its equipment can operate on a range of fuel sources and endorsed existing Pentagon policies to use alternatives “as long as mission capability is not restricted.”

“My broad priorities for defense energy investments will be those that increase military capabilities, provide more mission success and lower total cost,” Hagel wrote. “If confirmed, I will focus on both operational effectiveness and efficiency — improving the energy performance of aircraft, ships, ground vehicles and military bases; reducing the vulnerability of our fuel supply lines; lowering the load our expeditionary forces must carry; and diversifying the energy supplies we use.”

Senators vetting Hagel’s nomination said his views on global warming are on an already long list of questions they have on the Middle East, global disarmament and gays serving in the military. “Who are we getting? The guy today or the guy who said things before?” said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.).

Steven Hayward, a fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, said Hagel’s anti-green stance could make for an interesting exchange during Thursday’s confirmation hearings. “This could be more fun than I thought,” he wrote in a recent blog. “If liberal senators don’t ask about this, I hope some Republicans will, just for the discomfort it will cause on the left.”

Democrats say they are struggling to accept Hagel’s climate change history, but they don’t think it will sink the nomination.

“I’d be more concerned if it was secretary of state,” said Sen. Ben Cardin, a Maryland Democrat who has yet to say how he’ll vote on the Hagel nomination.

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who has already announced her support for Hagel after talking by phone with the nominee about his views on Israel, gay rights and women’s issues, said she’s not going to change her mind because Hagel once battled her on global warming. “I don’t hold against Chuck Hagel something he did 20 years ago on climate, nor do I hold against him some of the things he’s said that I didn’t agree with, that he’s changed, that his positions have evolved on,” she told POLITICO. “He’s going to represent the president’s views.”

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