

## *In the warming 'Green New Deal' debate, a tale of coasts vs. midlands*

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### **Body**

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WASHINGTON - When Democrats rolled out their "Green New Deal" resolutions in Congress, 38 of the 68 initial House sponsors were from three states: California, New York and Massachusetts. Only 18 were from noncoastal states.

Nine of 11 initial Democratic co-sponsors in the Senate were from coastal states. The other two - Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota - are running in a crowded Democratic presidential primary where the expansive, socialistic provisions in the measure appeal to liberal voters.

Such a coast vs. interior contrast that was so evident in President Donald Trump's election in 2016 is central to understanding the paralyzing polarization on **climate change**.

Republicans, strongest in the center of the country, defend fossil fuel as crucial to the nation's economic and national security. But that stance invites criticism that they're indifferent to science showing human activity contributes to rising greenhouse gas levels.

The Democrats' Green New Deal - a broadly written wish list advocating for transformational **changes** in the economy and society - has rekindled claims that the Democrats are again walking leftward off the deep end.

A study by a group affiliated with a former director of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said the plan, with guaranteed income and health care for everyone and expensive proposals to retrofit buildings to improve energy efficiency, could cost the U.S. a staggering \$93 trillion.

Twenty years ago, Republicans and Democrats were not that far apart in agreeing that global warming deserved cohesive national action.

Democrats were calling for more regulation but also backing "cap and trade" policies of Republican President George Bush.

Republicans, urging market-based environmental incentives, nominated **climate change** hawk John McCain for president in 2008. The party's platform that year said "human economic activity" had increased carbon emissions, and it declared that "common sense dictates that the United States should take measured and reasonable steps today to reduce any impact on the environment."

Eleven years later, while Democrats have moved toward socialist solutions, the GOP caucuses in Congress are sprinkled with **climate change** skeptics. Trump says he doesn't believe the dire national security warnings of the **climate** assessment issued by his own government, and he's forming his own **climate** advisory committee to challenge it.

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Looking to the 2020 elections, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell will soon force a vote on the Democrats' Green New Deal to draw a sharp line between Trump and the half dozen senators seeking the Democratic nomination.

"We'll give everybody an opportunity to go on record and see how they feel about the Green New Deal," McConnell said.

#### WHAT HAPPENED?

In the 1990s, Newt Gingrich-led Republicans were sharpening ideological differences with Democrats, and Republicans began arguing that the U.S. should do nothing to hurt the country's competition with other big polluting nations.

Democratic President Bill Clinton, under impeachment siege, was unable to get the Senate to agree to the U.S. entering the greenhouse-gas-limiting Kyoto climate accords.

After Democrat Barack Obama beat McCain in 2008, the rising Tea Party threatened Republican officeholders with primary challenges, and it defeated leading GOP climate change hawks like South Carolina's Rep. Bob Inglis.

Today, "environmental protection and especially climate change is a big part of political polarization in the United States," said Dave Robertson, political science chair at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Coastal residents, who are exposed to the threat of rising seas, are more likely than Middle America residents to blame human activity for rising temperatures and to be more amenable to significant government action to combat it.

In terms of its views on climate change, St. Louis is more akin to Seattle than Springfield, Mo., according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, an intensive study of county-level public opinion on the issue.

Its 2018 survey concluded that 78 percent of the residents of St. Louis, and 75 percent of those living in St. Louis County, agreed that "global warming is happening." Seattle and Washington, D.C., also came in at 78 percent, while in Greene County, where Springfield is the county seat, 67 percent agreed. Many rural Missouri counties were in the low 50s.

Statewide, Missouri was 5 points below the 70 percent national average of those who believe global warming to be real - 11 points below California and 12 below New York.

In the suburban district of Rep. Ann Wagner, R-Ballwin, 72 percent agreed that global warming is real. Next door, in the more rural district represented by Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer, R-St. Elizabeth, Mo., it was 61 percent.

Geography and differing philosophies on the role of government have shaped American politics since before the Declaration of Independence. The differences intensify when the problems go more global.

Days after the Green New Deal was introduced, Rep. William Lacy Clay, D-University City, announced he was going to support it because it includes language about seeking social and economic justice.

Clay released a photo showing him with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., who had campaigned last year for Clay's Democratic primary opponent, Cori Bush. Then, Ocasio-Cortez charged that Clay was among Democrats who had not been bold enough in tackling problems like this.

Ocasio-Cortez is the prime sponsor of the House resolution, and she's become a lightning rod for opponents, who seized on her statements and related climate change documents issued by her office (erroneously, a staffer said) that proposed everything from restricting air travel to cracking down on flatulating cows, while taxing 70 percent of income over \$10 million.

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Critics said it was socialism that would cripple the U.S. economy. Her allies say we're heading there, anyway, unless **climate change** is immediately addressed.

Even as he signed onto the Green New Deal, Clay warned fellow Democrats not to go too far left because of the political damage he says it could do to Democrats who won close elections in swing congressional districts to give their party control of the House.

"So hopefully we come to our senses as a party and realize there is enough room for all sides and not just one dogma, one ideology, that pushes you so far left that you become a minority," he said.

Republicans have portrayed Ocasio-Cortez and the Green New Deal as a threat to the fossil fuels, manufacturing and agricultural industries that power the interior.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., who says he believes **climate change** is real and that humans are contributing, also says that the Green New Deal would drastically shift economic and political power further from people who manufacture goods and grow food to Silicon Valley and Wall Street, which he said already disproportionately benefit from concentrations of technology and finance.

Hawley said the better solution would be to push market-based ideas in industries like biofuels, which would help agriculture.

"The Green New Deal strikes me as the biggest crony insider deal of all time," Hawley said. "It is a massive wealth transfer from the Midwest to the coasts, and from working families to rich ones. ... It would devastate farms in Missouri. It would devastate manufacturing in Missouri."

#### 'SIX AMERICAS'

The Yale study describes "six Americas" on **climate change**: "Alarmed," "concerned," "cautious," "disengaged," "doubtful" and "dismissive."

The National **Climate** Assessment issued by Trump's administration last year landed on the first two, concluding that "**climate change** creates new risks and exacerbates existing vulnerabilities in communities across the United States, presenting growing challenges to human health and safety, quality of life and the rate of economic growth." But Trump said "I don't believe" the federally mandated report, which was put together by scientists in conjunction with federal agencies led by his own appointees.

Some Republicans, like Hawley, Wagner and Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., are in the "cautious" category, acknowledging human activity but resisting the transformational economic and social **changes** advocated in the Democrats' Green New Deal.

"I am not a **climate change** denier," Wagner said. "There are things that we should be doing, but in the private sector."

"What we have to be careful about is the tradeoffs have to be balanced," she said. "We cannot disadvantage our own economy and business development."

She said energy giant Ameren's Renewable Choice Program giving consumers renewable energy source options was a good action blueprint. Roughly 80 percent of Missouri's energy now comes from coal.

**Climate change** deniers in her party "need to hear from some of their constituents," Wagner said.

"Let's face it," Wagner said, "we are not going to do this unless countries globally decide to take care of our Earth."

But that's what the Paris **climate** accords, which Trump withdrew the U.S. from, was ostensibly all about. Clay predicted Democrats will rely on science to eventually get the U.S. back into that accord.

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But Clay also acknowledged that the Green New Deal, with its potentially massive price tag and calls for total dependency on renewable energy, leaves it vulnerable to attacks from those who say Democrats are pushing these massive **changes** just as America has finally become energy independent through the development of fossil fuels.

"Some of that (criticism) is valid," Clay said. But the Green New Deal "moves the ball down the field as far as being able to start talking about specific legislation and really addressing **climate**."

## Graphic

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U.S. Rep. William Lacy Clay (D-University City) and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) are teaming up to cosponsor the Green New Deal Resolution in the U.S. House. Courtesy William Lacy Clay

## Classification

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