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AP Interview: Gore, volunteers target Congress

Al Gore and a band of environmental volunteers are taking the congressional fight over climate change legislation to the home districts of undecided lawmakers.

By **ERIK SCHELZIG**
Associated Press Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. —

Al Gore and a band of environmental volunteers are taking the congressional fight over climate change legislation to the home districts of undecided lawmakers.

The mission to spur congressional action marks a new phase for The Climate Project, Gore said in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday.

"We have to seize this moment, because it may not ever come around again," Gore said. "This is the time when the world is making up its mind."

The nonprofit group founded by Gore has trained about 3,000 people to deliver their own versions of the climate change slideshow that made him the star of the Oscar-winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" and the leading U.S. voice on global warming.

At a conference this weekend in Nashville, Gore is urging the volunteers to sell voters on a "cap and trade" system, setting a ceiling on greenhouse gas emissions, to counter the influence of industry lobbyists on members of Congress.

"We give their constituents the information in accessible form that the world scientific community has been hollering from the rooftops about," he said.

A bill now being considered by the U.S. House would create a system that sets a ceiling on greenhouse gas emissions and then allows companies to reduce their pollution or buy credits from firms that have met the targets.

Opponents call the plan a tax on energy.

Volunteers are stepping up their efforts to hold 36 town hall meetings about the bill in the home districts of key members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Gore said.

"And slideshows are being shown intensively in the districts where undecided members of Congress are interacting with their constituents trying to decide how they're going to vote on this bill," he said.

But not all committee members can be persuaded by Gore's group. Rep. Marsha Blackburn, a Republican from suburban Nashville and an opponent of the climate change bill, said her constituents have been clear about their opposition to the proposal.

"They are not willing to fork over more of their hard-earned money to see the earth's temperature reduced by one-quarter degree over the next 100 years," she said.



This weekend's conference will also feature scientists like Rajendra K. Pachauri, head of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with Gore.

Also giving their tips to activists will be political strategists like Steve Hildebrand, who was deputy national campaign director for Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

Gore said he's ramping up the group's advocacy activity to take advantage of the new political landscape in Washington.

"In order for the U.S. to lead the way, we've got to pass legislation here at home," Gore said.

When he addresses volunteers at the conference, Gore said he will emphasize the urgency of getting the cap-and-trade proposal passed.

"Getting that complicated but crucial message into the minds and hearts of the American people at a moment when their elected representatives are making one of the most fateful decisions they've ever had to make, that feels like it's work worth doing," he said. "And this is the moment in time when that needs to be done.

"Right now."

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