

In hot seat, Bush unveils new climate strategy

Proposals still leave him distant from Europe ahead of G8 summit



Pablo Martinez Monsivais / AP

President Bush visits a Washington, D.C., service station on May 25, 2005, that added a hydrogen pump for the small test fleet operated in the area by carmakers. His climate strategy has focused on technology solutions. European allies, on the other hand, want a U.S. pledge to curb emissions via regulatory actions.

WASHINGTON - Accused of dragging his feet on global warming, [President Bush](#) on Thursday proposed talks among the countries that emit the most greenhouse gases — a strategy that critics immediately labeled as counterproductive since a process already exists for international climate talks.

“The United States takes this issue seriously,” Bush said in a speech. “The new initiative I’m outlining today will contribute to the important dialogue that will take place in Germany next week” — a reference to the Group of Eight industrial nations' summit.

Bush called for the first in a series of meetings to begin this fall, bringing together countries identified as major emitters. The list would include the United States, China, India and major European countries. After setting a goal, the nations would be free to develop their own strategies to meet the target.

Bush's proposal is separate from U.N.-brokered climate talks already set for December in Bali, Indonesia.

The U.S. strategy also calls for cutting tariff barriers to sharing environmental technology and for a consensus by the end of 2008 on long-term goals for reducing the greenhouse gases tied to global warming.

Activists: 'Morally unacceptable'

But environmental and liberal groups were quick to criticize the proposals.

“The only way you can get a grip on carbon emissions is to cap and trade them globally. Bush has rejected that, so there are fundamental contradictions in these declarations,” said Greenpeace climate expert Charlie Kronick.

Added Kit Vaughan, a climate expert with the World Wildlife Fund: “This is trying to leapfrog next week's summit and the Bali meeting by aiming at the end of 2008. We don't have time for this. There are lives being lost. It is morally unacceptable.”

James Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, countered the plan “is actually accelerating” the process. “If we wanted to put things off further, you'd have annual meetings at the U.N. for the next five years. If you want to accelerate it, we do a lot of groundwork in between the U.N. meetings so we can bring the work product to the U.N. meetings.”

But Phil Clapp, head of the National Environmental Trust, also questioned the timing. “The White House is just trying to hide the fact that the president is completely isolated among the G8 leaders by calling vaguely for some agreement next year, right before he leaves office,” he said.

The liberal Center for American Progress called it a “do-nothing” policy.

“Our allies' pleas for action add to the voices of many big corporations such as Dow, Shell, General Electric and General Motors,” said Daniel Weiss, the group's climate strategy director. “These and other Fortune 500 companies endorsed a 60 percent to 80 percent reduction in global warming pollution by 2050, the level

scientists indicate that we must reach to stave off the worst impacts. Unfortunately, these appeals from his foreign and corporate allies continue to fall on President Bush's deaf ears.