

Senators back state management of carbon emissions

By LAUREN LANGLOIS

Associated Press

Louisiana could have its own, less stringent plan for implementing the Environmental Protection Agency's limits on carbon dioxide emissions, under a proposal that got the approval Tuesday of the state Senate Environmental Quality Committee.

Senate Bill 650 by the committee's chairman, state Sen. Mike Walsworth, would let the state Department of Environmental Quality decide how to apply EPA's upcoming rule on carbon dioxide emissions by setting standards for measuring emissions and the pace for following EPA's regulations.

The EPA plans to release new regulations by June to curb carbon dioxide emissions from existing power plants as part of President Barack Obama's Climate Action Plan. The agency released carbon dioxide emission limits for new power plants last year. The plan seeks to reduce carbon dioxide pollution.

Walsworth, R-West Monroe, said his bill would dictate how Louisiana achieves the result the EPA wants by giving the state agency flexibility with the federal guidelines. State Sen. A.G. Crowe, R-Slidell, cited the U.S. Constitution in arguing that states should have final regulatory authority.

The measure was supported by the coal industry, whose representatives argued the bill would manage the rise in cost for coal-powered energy that they say the new EPA rules will cause.

According to Brian Bond, of the Southwestern Electric Power Company, a rise in cost for coal would especially hurt the poor since many impoverished areas depend on coal. Bond was one of three coal industry representatives who testified for the proposal.

Opponents said the proposal would hurt efforts to fight carbon dioxide pollution by causing confusion and leniency in enforcing the new guidelines.

Haywood Martin, of the Louisiana chapter of the Sierra Club, spoke against the proposal, saying it is vital for Louisiana to limit power plants running on coal since they cause the most damage.

“Something has to be done,” he said.

Casey DeMoss, of the Alliance for Affordable Energy, said the proposal was an industry-backed effort pushed by the coal industry across the country. Like Martin, she said the bill would hurt Louisiana’s ability to limit carbon emissions, which have been proven to be harmful to the atmosphere.

“It is a global problem,” she said.

Committee members, however, said Walsworth’s proposal would not interfere with federal regulations, but give the state more authority on how to implement them.

Sen. Troy Brown, D-Napoleonville, said federal regulations will trump the state’s plan with or without the bill, so he didn’t object to passage.

The proposal moves next to the Senate floor.