



## BRIEF ON CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY (6.8)

### DEVELOPMENTS IN CONGRESS

- ***Farmers Fighting Climate Change Rewarded Under New Senate Bill.*** Climate-conscious farmers reducing their carbon footprints could profit under new legislation that a bipartisan group of senators will introduce Thursday.
  - The measure, spearheaded by Sens. Mike Braun (R-Ind.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), and Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), would establish a certification program under the Agriculture Department to motivate farmers and foresters to participate in carbon credit markets. A [list](#) of almost 50 supporters of the bill includes corporations such as McDonalds, Corp. and Microsoft, Corp., and prominent farm groups, like the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Farmers Union.
- ***House Climate Panel Readies Legislation.*** A climate panel Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.) launched to lay the groundwork for a host of House climate change bills is planning to unveil a series of legislative recommendations over the next month or so.
  - The House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, which lacks authority to advance climate bills on its own, is to release its detailed report as early as July, several House aides said. Pelosi had called for the report to be completed by March 31, but it was delayed as congressional attention shifted to the coronavirus pandemic.
- ***House Schedule to Focus on Key Water Bill.*** House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer laid out the lower chamber's schedule and procedures for the next two months in a [Dear Colleague letter](#) Friday, which detailed action on three "must-pass" bills, which includes an infrastructure package that, in part, would reauthorize expiring surface transportation provisions and the Water Resources Development Act.
- ***Democrats Push Clean Energy Rescue in Next Virus Recovery Bills.*** Dozens of House and Senate Democrats yesterday called on congressional leaders to put ailing wind, solar, and other renewable energy producers front and center in the next round of Covid-19 recovery packages.
  - A letter signed by 24 senators including Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) and dozens of House Democrats—including Rep. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.), who chairs a House Energy and Commerce panel on climate change—urged quick action to help a sector that has lost an estimated 600,000 jobs in recent months. The lawmakers suggested, among other actions, extending expiring clean energy tax credits.
- ***Legislation to Track Veterans' Exposure to Toxic Burn Pits Introduced in Congress.*** A bipartisan bill to better track veterans' exposure to toxic burn pits is being floated in Congress by Rep. Brian Mast (R-Fla.) and Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii), Alexandra Yetter reports.

- The [legislation](#) requires health care providers to inform veterans of a voluntary registry if they mention burn pits, building on the representatives' 2019 Burn Pits Accountability Act. Burn pits are open-air combustion sites for waste on military bases. More than 178,000 participants self-reported burn pit exposure in the [2020 Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#), with about 36% of them reporting respiratory problems.
- **Lawmakers Aim to Attach Climate Change Measures To NDAA.** Bipartisan lawmakers, led by freshman Rep. [Jason Crow](#) (D-Colo.), are pushing the Pentagon to take steps to lower the risks military bases face from water shortages and electrical grid vulnerabilities. Crow said he aims to incorporate two draft bills into the annual National Defense Authorization Act, [H.R. 6395 \(116\)](#).
  - [One of the bills](#) would require the Defense secretary to review how the Pentagon evaluates water scarcity at bases and would task the Pentagon with assessing water scarcity at military installations every 10 years. The second bill would authorize \$25 million for a two-year pilot program to mitigate vulnerabilities in electrical infrastructure on at least three military bases.
- **Manchin and Gardner Seek Support for Land and Water Conservation Fund.** Sens. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) said they have been making calls to press more members to commit to backing legislation, [S. 3422 \(116\)](#), to permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Currently, the measure has 59 pledged co-sponsors.
- **Key Environmental Justice Hearing Scheduled.** The House Energy and Commerce Committee is slated to hold [a virtual subcommittee hearing](#) on June 9 on the impact of Covid-19 on environmental justice communities.
- **Democrats Clamor for Clean Energy Aid.** Democratic lawmakers — led by Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) and House E&C Environment Subcommittee Chair Paul Tonko — [are calling on congressional leadership](#) to help the clean energy sector as part of any new economic recovery legislation, amid reports that the sector already lost nearly [600,000 jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic](#).
- **House Democrats Unveil Climate-Friendly Transportation Bill.** Democrats on the House Transportation Committee released their [\\$494 billion, five-year surface transportation bill](#) on Wednesday, prompting scorn from their Republican colleagues who say they were shut out of the process. That might ultimately mean the bill's climate provisions will be watered down once it hits conference.
- **Virus-Environment Hearing Scheduled.** The House Energy and Commerce Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee scheduled a June 9 [hearing](#) on "Pollution and Pandemics: Covid-19's Disproportionate Impact on Environmental Justice Communities."
- **Feinstein, Rubio Call on CFTC to Address Climate Change Financial Risks.** Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) asked the Commodity Futures Trading Commission to add specific recommendations for addressing the financial risk of climate change in the upcoming report by its Climate-Related Market Risk Subcommittee, the first federal financial regulator advisory committee focused on the risk climate change poses to the financial system.
  - "We appreciate that the CFTC recognizes the importance of climate change risk, and we encourage you to produce robust and specific recommendations for understanding and mitigating the risks of climate change to the U.S. financial system," the senators wrote in a [statement](#) yesterday.
- **Gulf Senators Want Changes to Conservation Bill.** Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) said yesterday he was joining Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) and other senators from oil- and gas-producing states in the Gulf of Mexico region to introduce a measure today aiming to increase the share of revenues from oil and gas royalties for their states under the Great American Outdoors Act ([S. 3422](#)).

Kennedy said he wants to remove a cap on the funding that can go to producing states, which he said “take all the risks” of oil spills or other accidents.

### TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ACTIONS

- ***EPA IG To Look at Tribal Drinking Water Oversight.*** EPA's Office of Inspector General [said it plans to evaluate](#) the agency's oversight of tribal drinking water systems, including its response to Covid-19.
  - The OIG said it is looking to determine the "effects of the EPA's oversight, including compliance assistance and enforcement activities, on the ability of public water systems in Indian Country to provide safe drinking water to customers," and how the agency modified its oversight during the coronavirus pandemic.
- ***Trump Admin Disarming States' Ability to Block Fossil Fuel Projects.*** The Trump Administration finalized a rule Monday that takes aim at a powerful tool used by states to block new pipelines and coal export terminals.
  - The [final rule](#), cheered by GOP lawmakers, limits the types of issues that states can consider when using their authority under Section 401 of the CWA to block a federal permit and sets tight deadlines for them to do so. The rule — which closely aligns with [a version proposed in August](#) — also allows EPA to overrule a state's permit denial if the agency decides the action was based on issues outside the scope of the state's authority.
- ***EPA Releases Final Chemical Plant Rule.*** The Trump administration finalized a rule Monday requiring petrochemical facilities across the country to plug leaks of ethylene oxide, a cancer-causing chemical. But the [regulation \(Reg. 2060-AT85\)](#) also allows emissions from the facilities to pose twice the health risk to local communities EPA typically considers acceptable
- ***EPA Reaches Safe Drinking Water Act Settlement.*** Under a [settlement agreement](#) with Waterkeeper Alliance and other groups filed Monday, EPA committed to meet a series of deadlines for evaluating new drinking water contaminants under the Safe Drinking Water Act and then making a formal decision on whether or not they warrant federal regulation, [Annie reports for Pros](#). The Safe Drinking Water Act sets a five-year cycle for these steps, but EPA has regularly missed those deadlines.
- ***Road through Alaska Refuge Blocked.*** A federal court threw out the Trump administration's latest attempt to build a road through Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge
- ***EPA Seeks Expedited Review for Methane Rollback.*** EPA has sent its final rule revoking methane pollution rules for new oil and gas wells (Reg. [2060-AT90](#)) to OMB for review, and the agency said in [a court filing](#) last week that it has requested an expedited review of just 30 days.
  - By repealing the methane limits for new wells, EPA will short-circuit a legal requirement for it to regulate the many existing oil and gas wells, a major industry goal. The agency says methane is already controlled well enough via regulations limiting volatile organic compounds.
- ***Judge Advances Anti-Dispersant Lawsuit.*** U.S. District Judge William Orrick on Tuesday advanced environmentalists' lawsuit seeking to force EPA to restrict the use of dispersants to clean up oil spills. Green groups want EPA to update its National Contingency Plan, arguing that much has been learned about dispersants' efficacy and ecological effects in the quarter-century since the last version was produced.
- ***Calculating the 'Blue Economy.'*** The U.S. marine economy contributed about \$373 billion to U.S. GDP in 2018, growing faster than the nation's economy as a whole, [according to statistics out of the Commerce Department](#) .

- The figures, from both NOAA and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, are a “first-of-its-kind estimate of the U.S. marine economy, a primary driver of jobs, innovation and economic growth,” said retired Navy Rear Adm. Tim Gallaudet, deputy NOAA administrator, in a statement.
- ***EPA to Float Cost-Benefit Reforms for Air Rules.*** EPA will release its proposed changes to how the agency calculates the costs and benefits of regulations under the Clean Air Act (Reg. [2060-AU51](#)).
  - Administrator Andrew Wheeler last year [declared it time to reform](#) the agency's long-time analytical practices to provide "greater clarity, transparency and consistency." Industry groups cheered, but environmentalists immediately dashed the move as an effort to make it more difficult to justify future regulations.
- ***Air Quality Improved During Trump Years, EPA Chief Says.*** The nation’s air quality improved during the Trump administration’s first three years, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler told Michigan’s Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce Tuesday.
  - But an American Lung Association official argued that the improvements were due to regulations already in place before President Donald Trump took office. Emissions of lead, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, ozone, and particulate matter dropped 7 percent between 2017 and 2019, Wheeler said, citing the most recent monitoring data. The EPA uses the six pollutants as measures of U.S. air quality.

#### 2020 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN NEWS

- ***Bernie-friendly DNC panel pushes Biden to back \$16T climate plan.*** The Democratic National Committee (DNC) Climate Council — which formed to push the party on climate issues — on Thursday released a set of [policy recommendations](#) calls for a greater investment than presumptive nominee Joe Biden’s [plan](#).
  - The climate group has endorsed spending between \$10 trillion and \$16 trillion in federal money over the next 10 years to address climate change whereas the former vice president's campaign calls for \$1.7 trillion in federal spending over the same period.

#### ENERGY ECONOMY NEWS

- ***How Financial Systems Can Gear Up for Climate Change.*** A [new report](#) recommends a series of steps U.S. regulators and institutions should take to insulate the financial system from climate change shocks.
  - The suggestions from business sustainability group Ceres include the Federal Reserve requiring stress tests to ensure financial health across a range of climate and policy scenarios, the SEC mandating climate risk disclosure rules and clarifying when such risks are considered material information for investors, and the Federal Housing Finance Authority researching climate risk to federally backed mortgages, among other items.
- ***Saudi Arabia, Russia Inch Toward Deal on Postlockdown Oil Cuts.*** An alliance of oil-producing nations led by Saudi Arabia and Russia is close to a deal that would extend their collective production cuts through Sept. 1, as the world emerges from pandemic-induced lockdowns, delegates said.
- ***Coal Groups Say Virus Has Sped Plant Closings and Ask for Help.*** A drop in electricity demand as businesses closed during the coronavirus outbreak threatens to shut coal plants early and action is needed to ensure the reliability of the nation’s power grid, three trade groups representing mining companies and utilities say.

- The groups said in a [letter](#) to the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, the non-profit watchdog responsible for setting standards for the power grid, that earlier forecasts of coal-fired power retirements through 2022 more than doubled, to nearly 50,000 megawatts from an earlier estimate of 18,000 megawatts.

### NEW CLIMATE STUDIES

- ***Study Demonstrates Massive Deforestation in 2019.*** The world lost the equivalent of a football field of primary rainforest every six seconds during 2019, according to data from the University of Maryland and [released by the World Resources Institute](#).

### STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEWS

- ***VW Faces Revived Diesel-Cheat Suits by Florida, Utah Counties.*** Volkswagen Group of America and related companies face revived suits from Florida and Utah counties alleging that cars' diesel-cheat mechanisms violated state and local pollution control laws, because the Clean Air Act preempts only some of the claims, the Ninth Circuit said.
  - Volkswagen settled the Environmental Protection Agency's criminal and civil actions for more than \$20 billion but didn't obtain a release of liability from state and local governments, the court said.
- ***State Officials Back Fund to Plug Orphan Wells.*** State officials from North Dakota and New Mexico said federal funding for plugging tens of thousands of so-called orphan oil and gas wells would provide jobs to out-of-work energy service employees and reduce water and methane pollution. [States have worried aloud](#) that they lack adequate funding to plug and remediate such wells and that an oil market crunch will further exacerbate the problem if failing companies shirk cleanup duties.
- ***California's Emissions Drop Downside.*** The pandemic may have slashed greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality across the U.S., but in California that silver lining comes with a downside, [Pro's Debra Kahn reports](#). Plummeting climate auctions put the state's high-speed rail project and energy efficient affordable housing at risk for cuts — and it's not clear where the money can be found elsewhere.
- ***California Study Finds Lower Birth Weights Near Oil, Gas Wells.*** Pregnant women living in rural areas close to active oil and gas wells are at higher risk of having babies that weigh less than those born in urban areas, a study of millions of birth records in California shows. The University of California, Berkeley, study published yesterday analyzed 3 million birth certificates over a decade and compared them to oil and gas barrel production during the course of the pregnancies.

### INTERNATIONAL NEWS

- ***China Says Sticking to Climate Pledges Despite Coronavirus Outbreak.*** China will fully implement its commitment to nationally determined contributions (NDCs) on climate change under the Paris climate agreement despite the coronavirus outbreak, the country's environment ministry said on Tuesday.
  - China, the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, pledged to cut "carbon intensity" - the amount of carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP - by 40-45% from 2005-2020 as part of the Paris pact it signed in 2015. It said last year it would set a more ambitious target, without giving figures.

- ***U.K. Set to Tighten Carbon Market in Post-Brexit Net Zero Push.*** The U.K. government's plan to create its own carbon market after it leaves the European Union will likely make it more expensive to burn fossil fuels in the country than ever before.
  - The proposed emissions trading scheme is a small part of overall Brexit planning, but its success could play a critical part in Britain's ambition to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The EU's ETS operates as a cap-and-trade system, with a value of around 34 billion euros (\$38 billion) last year, that provides a market incentive to heavy polluters to reduce carbon emissions.
- ***Automakers Warned by EU to Significantly Cut Emissions.*** The European Union told automakers to do more to meet stringent emission targets after a new report showed carbon dioxide pollution from cars increased.
  - Average emissions of new passenger cars registered in the EU and Iceland in 2018 rose to 120.8 grams of carbon dioxide a kilometer, up 2 grams from the previous year. That's more than a quarter higher than the fleet-wide target of 95 gram taking effect from this year. "Manufacturers will have to improve the fuel efficiency of their fleet and accelerate the deployment of zero- and low-emission vehicles," the European Commission said in a statement on Wednesday.
- ***Huge Spill Stains Arctic and Climate Change Could Be the Cause.*** A massive fuel spill in Siberia prompted Russia to declare a state of emergency in the region as the mining company involved said the catastrophe may have been caused by climate change. Scientists have warned for years that thawing of once permanently frozen ground covering more than half of Russia is threatening the stability of buildings and pipelines.
  - Greenpeace said the accident two weeks ago was the largest ever in the Arctic region, and likened it to the Exxon Valdez spill off Alaska in 1989. The cause of the spill, in which 20,000 tons of diesel (or about 150,000 barrels) leaked from a reservoir owned by MMC Norilsk Nickel PJSC, hasn't been determined but the company has suggested it could be the result of damage from melting permafrost. The rate of warming in the Arctic is twice as fast as the rest of the world.