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Greenhouse Gas Must Be Capped, McCain Asserts

By ELISABETH BUMILLER and JOHN M. BRODER

Correction Appended

PORTLAND, Ore. — Senator John McCain sought to distance himself from President Bush on Monday as he called for a mandatory limit on greenhouse gas emissions in the United States to combat climate change.

Mr. McCain, in a speech at a wind power company, also pledged to work with the European Union to diplomatically engage China and India, two of the world's biggest polluters, if they refuse to participate in an international agreement to slow global warming.

In the prepared text of his speech, e-mailed to reporters on Sunday night and Monday morning, Mr. McCain went so far as to call for punitive tariffs against China and India if they evaded international standards on emissions, but he omitted the threat in his delivered remarks. Aides said he had decided to soften his language because he thought he could be misinterpreted as being opposed to free trade, a central tenet of his campaign and Republican orthodoxy.

But he took a shot at Mr. Bush.

"I will not shirk the mantle of leadership that the United States bears," Mr. McCain said pointedly. "I will not permit eight long years to pass without serious action on serious challenges."

In speeches on the campaign trail, Mr. McCain frequently highlights the threat of climate change, but he has a mixed record on the environment in the Senate. In recent years he has pushed legislation to curb emissions that contribute to climate change, but he has missed votes on toughening fuel economy standards and has opposed tax breaks meant to encourage alternative energy.

In his address on Monday, Mr. McCain, the presumptive Republican president nominee, renewed his support for a "cap-and-trade" system in which power plants and other polluters could meet limits on heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide by either reducing emissions on their own or buying credits from more efficient producers.

Mr. McCain's break with the Bush administration means that the three main presidential candidates have embraced swifter action to fight global warming.

The two Democrats seeking their party's presidential nomination, Senators Barack Obama of Illinois and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, criticized the McCain plan as too timid, because their plans would reduce emissions more quickly. Leaders of several environmental groups were

also sharply critical and noted Mr. McCain's Senate votes against incentives for energy conservation and alternative energy sources like wind and solar power.

Other environmental advocates offered qualified praise for Mr. McCain, who was among the first in Congress to introduce legislation to address the carbon emissions that scientists blame for the warming of the planet.

Mr. McCain said on Monday that the problem demanded urgent national and international action.

"Instead of idly debating the precise extent of global warming, or the precise timeline of global warming, we need to deal with the central facts of rising temperatures, rising waters, and all the endless troubles that global warming will bring," he said at a Vestas wind turbine manufacturing plant in Oregon, where the environment is a central issue for voters. "We stand warned by serious and credible scientists across the world that time is short and the dangers are great."

The senator's remarks were a clear criticism of Mr. Bush, who in his first term questioned the scientific basis for global warming and who has remained opposed to mandatory caps on emissions, which he says would be bad for the American economy. The administration also rejected the international Kyoto protocol, which limits emissions of heat-trapping gases.

Mr. McCain's speech, a compilation and sharpening of many of his existing proposals, was most notable as a political document that sought to appeal to the independents he is wooing for November. It put him slightly to the right of center in the environmental debate.

Mr. McCain simultaneously released a television commercial in Oregon about his position on climate change, and startled audience members at his speech by praising and sharing the stage with Ted Kulongoski, the Democratic governor of Oregon who has endorsed Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton for president.

Mr. McCain is the only Republican presidential candidate this year to call for mandatory limits on heat-trapping gases, but his target for reducing emissions is lower than that of Senators Clinton and Obama, and even lower than that in a bill proposed by Senators Joseph I. Lieberman, independent of Connecticut, and John W. Warner, Republican of Virginia.

In his speech, Mr. McCain advocated cutting emissions 60 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2050; Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Obama propose cutting them by 80 percent in the same time frame while the Lieberman-Warner bills calls for a 70 percent reduction. Scientists say reductions of that magnitude are needed to slow and then reverse production of the gases, chiefly carbon dioxide, which are heating the atmosphere and causing long-term climate changes.

Mr. McCain said the United States must seek new, cleaner sources of energy to replace the burning of coal and oil, which produce the bulk of the gases that are blamed for the warming of the planet. "As we move toward all of these goals, and over time put the age of fossil fuels behind

us," he said, "we must consider every alternative source of power, and that includes nuclear power."

Mr. McCain has long advocated nuclear power as a way to cut emissions, and frequently promotes it in his campaign appearances as an alternative energy source. His view is shared by many utility executives and many Republicans in Congress, but it puts him at odds with Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton, who have expressed skepticism about the cost and safety of nuclear power plants.

There are no incentives for building new nuclear plants in the Lieberman-Warner legislation now before the Senate that his Democratic rivals have endorsed, and Mr. McCain suggested on Friday that he would not support the measure unless it contained some nuclear power subsidies.

Mr. McCain's proposal in his prepared remarks to impose tariffs on industrializing countries like China and India is also made in the Lieberman-Warner bill and reflects concerns by both industry and labor in the United States and elsewhere in the industrialized world. It would mandate punitive duties on products from any country that did not participate in a global carbon-reduction system, to balance the lower cost of producing goods using dirty-energy sources.

In another contrast with Mr. Bush, Mr. McCain also sought to persuade voters that he had a personal concern and first-hand experience with climate change, which has emerged as a major issue in the 2008 presidential race.

"A few years ago I traveled to the area of Svalbard, Norway --it's a group of islands in the Arctic Ocean," Mr. McCain said. "I was shown the southernmost point where a glacier had reached twenty years earlier. From there, we went northward for miles, up the fjord to see where that same glacier ends today, because all the rest, all the rest, has melted."

Reaction to Mr. McCain proposals from environmental advocates was lukewarm. Several environmental groups said that his plan did not go far enough but that they were grateful to hear a Republican recognizing what they consider an urgent problem and offering a detailed plan to solve it. But Mr. McCain came under considerable criticism for repeatedly opposing federal programs to encourage energy conservation and alternative fuel sources.

Daniel J. Weiss, who heads the global warming program at the Center for American Progress in Washington, said Mr. McCain had often voted with Democrats on environmental bills but at other times had taken contrary positions.

Elisabeth Bumiller reported from Portland, Ore., and John M. Broder from Washington. Kitty Bennet also contributed reporting from Washington.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: May 19, 2008

An article on Tuesday about Senator John McCain's proposals to combat global warming referred incorrectly to the Washington-based Center for American Progress, whose top official noted that

Mr. McCain sometimes voted with Democrats on environmental bills. Although the Center for American Progress often supports policies espoused by the Democratic Party, it is not "a Democratic policy shop" or officially affiliated with the party.

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