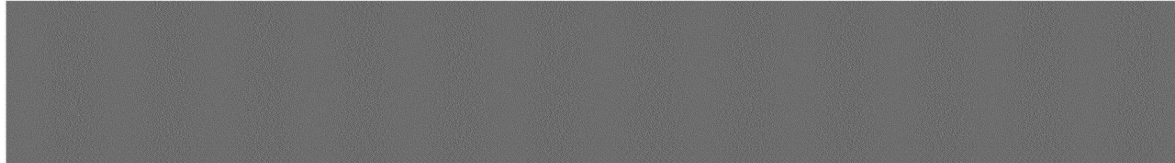


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## Republicans Break Ranks With Pledge To Fight Climate Change

By Eric Roston | March 15, 2017 10:21AM ET | Bloomberg Government

Photographer: Joshua Lott/AFP via Getty Images

(Bloomberg) -- Seventeen conservative Republican members of Congress—10 of them in their first or second terms—are bucking long-time party positions and the new White House. They announced Wednesday that they're supporting a clear statement about the risks associated with climate change, and principles for how best to fight it.

Called the "Republican Climate Resolution" by supporters, the statement takes about 450 words to mention conservative thought on environmentalism, support for climate science, feared impacts, and a call for economically viable policy. The members pledge in general terms to support study and mitigation measures, "using our tradition of American ingenuity, innovation, and exceptionalism."

It's essentially the same thing that was introduced in September 2015 by former Representative Chris Gibson of New York. What's changed since then is that almost 200 nations agreed to work to bring climate change under control, America elected a Republican president, Donald Trump, who seems determined not to, and the challenge itself grows continuously worse.

With 17 co-sponsors, the resolution is oceans away from the number of votes it needs to pass the Republican-controlled House of Representatives. Fortunately, its likelihood of passage is not what makes it interesting.

These bills are interesting in the way that solar energy is, even though solar makes up 1 percent of U.S. power generation. Like solar power, Republican climate bills are

noteworthy not because one is likely to pass anytime soon, but because massive external forces—markets, other governments, and climate change itself—may eventually force it into the foreground.

The resolution is spearheaded by three Republican members of Congress: Elise Stefanik of New York, Carlos Curbelo of Florida, and Ryan Costello of Pennsylvania. The bill's co-sponsors hail from parts of the country on the front lines of climate change—three represent southern Florida. Others come from northern Nevada and central Utah, where mountain snowpack has declined in recent decades. And Representative Mark Sanford, of eastern South Carolina, has a district that's seeing sea-level rise slowly eat away at its coastline.

"Our founding fathers set up a political system that was to be reason-based," Sanford said Tuesday. "They didn't believe in 'alternative facts.'"

Curbelo represents Monroe County, which includes the Florida Keys, and part of Miami-Dade County. A leader of the new resolution, he's also co-founder of the House Climate Solutions Caucus, a bipartisan group. The caucus, which has new members admitted in pairs, one Republican and one Democrat, was set up to explore climate policy. Eleven of its 13 Republican members are co-sponsors of the new resolution (six representatives are co-sponsors but do not belong to the caucus, according to a roster maintained by the nonprofit Citizens Climate Lobby).

Curbelo said in a conference call that the most critical participants in climate discussions—including major oil companies—are all "moving in the right direction."

"Congress, specifically the House Republican Conference, has to catch up to all of them," Curbelo said. "That's what we're trying to do here."

The bill is this month's contribution to Washington's constant climate background hum. It follows February's splashy carbon tax-and-rebate announcement, developed by a group called Climate Leadership Council and endorsed by three former Republican U.S. Treasury secretaries. That initiative, like today's, is premised on the idea that, as CLC founder Ted Halstead, put it, "There is no issue in America today where there is a bigger gap between the GOP base and the GOP leadership."

Sanford, who served as South Carolina's governor from 2003 to 2011, suggested that the future of climate resolutions or policies is up to voters. "There's been a level of energy that I've never seen before in my time in politics," he said.

If that energy broadens beyond the dismantling of the Affordable Care Act, issues such as climate change might rise to greater prominence. In the meantime, Sanford said there's enough science and enough resonant anecdotal evidence. "I think it's dangerous," he said.

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