

WNBZ

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## Green Groups Talk Acid Rain with Gillibrand, Senator Promises Support

New York's junior Senator Kirsten Gillibrand spoke with leaders from several environmental groups Friday afternoon at the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake.

Gillibrand took a five-county tour of the North Country Friday, mostly discussing economic development in rural regions. But she took a break to talk pending environmental legislation with the leaders of the Adirondack Council, Nature Conservancy and Adirondack Mountain Club.

Gillibrand argues that her placement on the Environment and Public Works, Foreign Relations and Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry committees gives her above-average influence over the legislation's final form.

"Now is the time to debate climate change, because there are six committees in the Senate that have jurisdiction over drawing up this bill, and I'm on three of them," she said. "Those committees will make a big impact on what this bill will ultimately look like."

For the first time, the Senate Clean Air Planning Act – authored by Delaware Democrat and chairman of the Clean Air and Nuclear Safety Subcommittee Tom Carp – would roll together language to stem greenhouse gas emissions with mercury and acid rain reduction measures.

Gillibrand said that she supports the Carp bill – which would require 20 percent reductions in nitrogen and sulfur oxide over the next five years and would aim for 80 percent reductions by 2050.

It would also require significant reductions in Ozone and Mercury emissions over the same time period.

The Senator was critical of the House for lacking the Senate's ambition on pollution control measures.

"One of the biggest problems with the House bill was that it created an exception with the Clean Air Act for coal," Gillibrand said. "So it was giving exception to the dirtiest coal plants in the country to continue to pollute without any Clean Air Act oversight."

According to the state funded Adirondack Lakes Survey Corporation, roughly 60 percent of Adirondack lakes are experiencing dwindling water quality levels – choking life and slowly poisoning local human populations.

The environmental and scientific communities attribute the rapid decline in regional water quality to pollutants spewed from about 80 coal-powered electricity plants in the Tennessee and Ohio valleys.

According to Adirondack Mountain Club executive director Neil Woodworth, in-park mercury levels are six times the level measured 100 years ago. He also noted empirical evidence of increased mercury levels in the bodies of area women of child-bearing age.

Woodworth and Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian Houseal and Nature Conservancy Director of Federal Programs David Higby lauded Gillibrand for supporting and influencing the Carp bill. They also called for increased U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regulation on coal burning plants to require the use of pollutant reducing scrubbers.

Houseal said the council supports the Carp legislation.

"I know the senator has heard from hundreds of northern and upstate New York constituents about the need to include acid rain in the climate change bill," he said. "And we're hoping that she will back the language that Senator Carp from Delaware has included in the climate change bill."

Woodworth wants even more immediate and drastic regulation.

"We could remove 90 percent of mercury," he said. "That should be the standard. The technology is here, and given the tax incentives that the senator has suggested, we could do that by 2015."

But for Gillibrand, the passage of a practical bill that can gain support with Democrats from states with coal-fired plants and coal mines is more important than taking a philosophical stand with even stronger legislation that would likely fail in committee.

"We don't want a watered-down acid rain provision, and Chairwoman Boxer has said she's only going to allow amendments that have 100 percent Democratic support," Gillibrand said. "So we have a lot of mid-westerners who are not going to support it. So maybe we could get it through in conference or in a stand-alone bill."

Gillibrand said the creation of incentives for the installation of the costly scrubber system with tax breaks may be the compromise that the coal industry and their Senators are looking for.

Discussions regarding the Carp legislation began last week and are expected to continue throughout the current legislative session.

-Jon Alexander, 11-2-09