

AOC, Sanders, and Blumenauer press Biden to declare a ‘climate emergency’

In his first 15 days in office, President Joe Biden canceled the Keystone XL pipeline, pledged to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies from the federal government, and started the process of unwinding Trump’s disastrous environmental legacy. And now a trio of Democratic lawmakers wants Biden to declare a “climate emergency” as soon as possible.

Representative Earl Blumenauer of Oregon, along with Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, introduced legislation on Thursday that would require Biden make such a declaration. The bill compares the action needed on the climate crisis to the wartime mobilization during World War II and urges Biden to declare an emergency under the National Emergencies Act, thus unlocking more than 100 additional presidential powers to tackle the crisis. “It’s past time that a climate emergency is declared,” Blumenauer said in a statement. “This bill can finally get it done.”

The proposed legislation follows a statement last week by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York, who urged Biden to declare an emergency to bypass Republican heel-dragging in Congress. “If there ever was an emergency, climate change is one,” Schumer said.

The U.S. wouldn’t be the first country to call climate change a crisis. To date, 38 countries around the world — including Japan, New Zealand, and the European Union — have declared similar “climate emergencies.” But most of those declarations have been symbolic resolutions, and so haven’t come with any additional tools to address the overheating planet.

In the U.S., however, the National Emergencies Act could give Biden real powers: The president could use the declaration to reinstitute a ban on crude oil exports, send emergency aid packages to states, or even redirect billions of dollars of funding away from defense projects and toward the production of renewable energy. President Trump tried to use the act in 2019 to funnel money from the Pentagon to his project to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, but was

rebuffed by the courts and Congress.

These would be big, sweeping actions, but they also might upset Republican members of Congress, who are already criticizing Biden's spree of executive orders as presidential overreach and whose support Biden might need to tackle some of his other legislative goals. Some have also argued that, even when done with the best of intentions, declaring a national emergency serves as an end-run around the democratic process.

The bill looks like a long shot at the moment, given both the narrow Democratic majority in the Senate and the fact that its only purpose is to encourage Biden to use his presidential powers. Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez introduced a similar resolution in 2019 that won support from many senators and representatives but never came up to a vote in the Democratic-controlled House. Still, the new bill may serve as a potent symbol — a sign that there is growing pressure on Biden to act swiftly on climate change, whether Republicans like it or not.

Source:

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