

Climate and Green Housing

Despite the failure of the Senate to agree on a Climate Bill before the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009, there continues to be considerable interest in climate change legislation and green building initiatives on Capitol Hill. As of this writing, Senators Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Joseph Lieberman, (I-CT), and John Kerry (D-MA) have announced they expect to release a new version of the climate bill.

Advocates can make the following points regarding any forthcoming bills with legislators:

- Low income households are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change:
Low income households often lack the resources with which to mitigate the effects of climate change. They also face greater geographic exposure to its impacts, for example living in flood plains or in areas without adequate green space or plentiful water.
- Investing in low income housing is a sound climate strategy:
Residential buildings produce nearly a fifth of green house gas emissions. The nation's affordable housing - HUD and USDA properties in particular - tend to be older and less energy efficient. This stock represents "low-lying fruit" for major reductions in energy use and green house gas emissions.
- Green technology and retrofits are sound housing policy:
Energy efficiency investments also help to preserve developments, increase their comfort and appearance and improving the safety and reliability of heating and other systems. Not least they reduce energy bills and other costs for tenants and owners.
- Green public and assisted housing can generate federal budget savings:
While many subsidized tenants pay all or a portion of their own utilities, the federal government may also contribute depending on the program. HUD currently estimates that it spends nearly \$5 billion a year on energy costs for its Section 8 and public housing stock alone and gains in efficiency will be realized directly as budget savings.
- Climate Change Policy must be Progressive, not Regressive:
Low income households need to be the least impacted by the increasing cost of energy likely to come with any regulation of carbon or green house gases and the most likely to receive benefits that are large relative to their energy use and costs.

Background

There was considerable federal activity around climate change in 2009, particularly in advance of the United Nations Climate Talks in Copenhagen, Denmark. In 2009, the House passed H.R. 2454 and, along a similar, the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act was introduced in the Senate. Both of these bills contained a set-aside for investments in public and assisted housing and other measures to assist the lowest income households. The "cap and trade" approach in the 2009 House and Senate bills failed to gain traction and new legislation is now taking shape in the Senate.