

Climate Facts and Fancy: From God to Cows, Facts and Falsehoods Accompany Global Warming Votes

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On Wednesday, one of this political era's most contentious issues — climate change — came to a head on Capitol Hill, as both the House and Senate debated and voted on proposals to block the Environmental Protection Agency from regulating greenhouse gas emissions. In the House, the ban prevailed; in the Senate, though, multiple amendments foundered and supporters lacked enough votes to override a threatened veto by President Obama.

As frequently happens during such showdowns, claims and counter-claims on both sides flew fast and furious — among them a few wily distortions and utter fictions you're likely to hear again because the dueling combatants are just getting warmed up. While the votes were largely symbolic and have no chance of becoming law, the debate allowed partisans on both sides to stake out territory they'll revisit in the run-up to the 2012 election.

Here's our latest check of the facts behind some of those claims, from God's role in global warming to the culpability of cows. In the months ahead, we'll keep tabs on such claims involving climate change and other topics, so please let us know your nominees for closer inspection.

And while we're objective, we're not infallible — so please let us know if you think we've got it wrong. (You can send us a tweet [@publici](#) or email us at webmaster@publicintegrity.org

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Claim: EPA regulation of greenhouse gases would harm small businesses and farmers.

Facts: The EPA's current [rule](#) applies only to companies that will contribute more than 75,000 tons per year of carbon emissions and that already need a permit because of substantial emissions of other pollutants. Later this year, the rule will extend to companies that don't currently require permits for other emissions but that will emit more than 100,000 tons per year of carbon pollution. EPA says, "Emissions from small farms, restaurants, and all but the very largest commercial facilities will not be covered by these programs at this time." The EPA does plan, however, to seek input on the possibility of phasing in more emissions sources in 2013. Whether that could include small

businesses and farms is, at least until then, unclear.

Claim: The EPA plans to regulate cow flatulence as a source of greenhouse gases.

House Republicans noted during floor debate Wednesday that the EPA's own website details the substantial contributions of livestock to methane emissions. Their assertion: Ranchers and dairies will have to pay a hidden levy for bovine releases. "They're [the EPA] going to blame cattle, they're going to tax cattle ... because that's what they're proposing," said Texas Republican Pete Sessions.

Facts: The government is proposing no levies pegged to cows' contribution to global warming. EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, [testifying](#) on March 10 before House Committee on Agriculture, explicitly denounced the so-called "Cow Tax" as a myth. "The truth is, EPA is proposing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a responsible, careful manner and we have even exempted agricultural sources from regulation," she said. Even so, ruminants themselves are not exactly wearing white hats when it comes to climate change; as the EPA [does note](#) on its Web site, the world's livestock altogether produce about 80 million metric tons of methane annually, making them the largest source of the greenhouse gas produced in human-related activities — about 28% of all emissions globally.

Claim: Climate change is not caused by human activities.

During floor debate Wednesday, some Republicans questioned the science behind global warming. Rep. Joe Barton, a Texas Republican said, "Man-made CO₂ [carbon dioxide] does not contribute to climate change." And North Carolina Republican Virginia Foxx referenced books by climate-change skeptics and lamented that some environmentalists "think that we, human beings, have more impact on the climate and the world than God does."

Facts: While people frequently differ on the impact of deities, scientists have reached a broad consensus on global warming. A 2010 [report](#) from the National Academy of Sciences found, for instance, that "climate change is occurring, is caused largely by human activities, and poses significant risks for — and in many cases is already affecting — a broad range of human and natural systems." A congressionally mandated report in 2009 by the [U.S. Global Change Research Program](#), which integrates and coordinates federal research, concluded: "Observations show that warming of the climate is unequivocal. The global warming observed over the past 50 years is due primarily to human-induced emissions of heat-trapping gases." Not all religious believers concur on global warming, and [some Christian evangelists](#) have become evangelists for limiting emissions to ward off the consequences of climate change.

Claim: EPA regulation of greenhouse gases is a workaround method of achieving the cap-and-trade system that failed in Congress in 2009.

Republicans characterized the EPA regulation as an attempt by "unelected bureaucrats" to push President Barack Obama's agenda even after cap-and-trade legislation failed to pass in Congress. "Democrats forced passage of the controversial cap and trade legislation. Americans quickly learned of the thousands of dollars in new energy costs that would be imposed on their families each year," complained Illinois Republican Adam Kinzinger in an April 5 [newspaper column](#). "While cap and trade failed in the Senate, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is still attempting to enforce a backdoor cap and trade system on the American people."

Facts: While those who worry about climate change clearly are trying to find multiple ways of limiting greenhouse gases, there's no sign that Obama or Democrats in Congress are making another stab at cap and trade. They're after some of the same results that would have been achieved with cap and trade — reduction in emissions — but not through a cap and trade system. California Democrat Henry Waxman tried to make the denial official by reading into the record Wednesday a letter from the EPA in response to Congressional inquiries. In the letter, the agency said it had not considered — and has no plans to consider — a cap-and-trade system.

Claim: The EPA's regulation of greenhouse gases as pollutants is an impermissible misuse of the [Clean Air Act](#).

Facts: The Clean Air Act instructs the EPA to set standards for emissions of a wide range of air pollutants that could endanger public health. In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that greenhouse gases are pollutants under the Clean Air Act. In 2009, the EPA issued a finding that these emissions may endanger public health, allowing the agency to regulate them.

Fact: Cows are a leading source of methane, a greenhouse gas. Fancy: The Obama administration intends to tax ranchers for ruminants' flatulence. Charlie Litchfield/Associated Press

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