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# Senate Democrats push back deadline on Obama climate change agenda

- Barbara Boxer tries to balance regional interests
- EPA head likens environment issue to space race

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**Barack Obama** hit a snag in his ambitious climate change agenda today when Senate Democrats pushed back their deadline to produce a draft bill until September.

Barbara Boxer, the chair of the environment and public works committee who is spearheading the Obama environment agenda, said she had scaled back plans of writing a first draft of a climate change bill before Congress goes on its August recess.

"We will do it as soon as we get back," she told reporters.

She insisted that the delay would not jeopardise chances of getting climate change legislation through Congress this year. But the move comes amid signs of rising opposition to the bill in the Senate from moderate Democrats as well as Republicans.

Boxer would not guarantee that Congress would be able to pass legislation before December, when Obama is due to attend an international summit on climate change at Copenhagen.

"I want to take this as far as we can take it," she said. "The more we can do the better."

The downshifting in the Democrats' agenda comes a day after a meeting of Obama's energy and climate change team at the White House, and marks an acknowledgement by the Administration of the daunting challenge of getting enough votes for the bill in the delicately balanced Senate. Boxer tried and failed a year ago to pass a climate change bill.

Only 48 hours ago, the Obama administration initially had appeared confident it could get a bill through the Senate, and at high speed. The Democratic leadership in the Senate envisaged all committees signing off on a draft by mid-September.

On Tuesday, Obama despatched a quartet of officials to the Senate to drum up support for the move to a clean energy economy.

Lisa Jackson, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, likened the decades ahead to the space race of the mid-20th century, saying America risked being left behind if it did not jump to develop clean energy technologies.

The high profile start was seen as an attempt to build on a narrow vote for a sprawling

climate change bill in the house of representatives late last month.

But as Boxer moved to capitalise on that momentum and try to pass a version of the 1,400-page bill there were growing signs of dissent from fellow Democrats, further jeopardising the chances of getting enough votes to pass the bill.

Democrats from oil and coal producing states demanded that the bill cushion consumers against future rises in electricity costs; those from rural areas called for protections for farmers.

"I hope we can fix cap and trade so it doesn't unfairly punish businesses and families in coal dependent states like Missouri," tweeted Missouri's senator Claire McCaskill.

Meanwhile, other Democrats in leadership positions in the Senate complained they were being put under pressure to rush through complicated legislation on two major topics: energy and healthcare.

Today's delay could buy time for Boxer to try to balancing the powerful constituencies who control the fate of the bill: coastal urban areas vs rural heartland and industrial states, western states which have wind and solar resources vs coal-dependent south-east.

However, Republicans who are almost uniformly opposed to climate change legislation immediately claimed the delay as a sign that Obama's agenda was foundering.

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