

Democrat senators push for climate change investment

October 3, 2021



With Congress working hard to approve funding to keep the government open, Democratic senators from the West Coast said the budget must include funding to deal with climate change.

During a press call Wednesday, the senators, led by Patty Murray from Washington and Oregon's two senators, said the country cannot afford to wait when it comes to climate change.

"In Western states, we got hit by a heat wave that literally made the pavement on our highways buckle," Murray said. "We've been hit by severe drought, and we're not out of the woods yet on what has been a really tough wildfire season. These are really stark reminders to all of us up close and personal that the climate crisis is here and now, not some distant worry for another day."

Murray said Congress must have a sense of urgency to handle climate change and they have to invest in a renewable electric grid.

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden said the reconciliation package must include funding for climate change and must include it now. Wyden said those who live in Oregon have seen the impact of climate change first-hand.

"For those of us in the West, the reality is these are not your grandfather's fires," Wyden said. "They're hotter, they're more powerful, they leap over rivers and it's hot and it's dry and if someone drops a match, all of a sudden you have an inferno on your hands. You saw that with the Bootleg fire in Oregon this summer, where in effect it was so powerful it moved the weather."

Wyden said the Build Back Better plan must include three components to address climate change. The first is to create a 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps.

"What we ought to be doing is putting thousands and thousands of young people to work in these woods," Wyden said. "They ought to be doing preventative work to prevent the future Bootleg fires."

The second step is to use the volunteers to do more prescribed burns.

"What you do is you go in during the cooler, winter months and do careful burns, and you're able to prevent fires later on in the hot and dry season," Wyden said.

The third step is to reduce carbon emissions.

"My Clean Energy for America Act is the lynchpin for what we're going to be doing to grow clean energy in America and support thousands of good-paying jobs," Wyden said.

He said the bill would get rid of 44 tax cuts for the energy industry and replace them with three tax breaks for clean energy, clean transition and energy efficiency.

Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley also said it is time to act.

"Last Labor Day, I drove 600 miles and never got out of the smoke in Oregon," Merkley said. "It is a sight I never want to see again. We have to wake up and smell the smoke and recognize the enormous increase in fire is being driven by climate change. We need to wake up and swim the waters where rainstorms have dumped unprecedented amounts of water in the midwest and flooded cities."

Merkley said fixing the climate crisis can be done and it can be done now.

"The answer is pretty simple, electrify everything with renewable energy," Merkley said. "Put renewable energy on the grid to replace fossil energy on the grid. That is what Build Back Better does. It has an investment in a climate corps. It has tax abatements for solar and wind. It may well have another incentive like carbon tax to help drive transition, and it will have forest management in it. We have a lot of work to do. We have to pass Build Back Better."

The final speaker was California Sen. Alex Padilla, who said Californians see the impact of climate change every day.

"For families in California, the climate crisis has become a daily reality," Padilla said. "This summer, as many of you saw, thousands of Californians were forced to flee their homes. Families in other parts of California have either torn out the crops or lit acres and acres on fire because of the escalating drought."

Padilla said the Democrats must use their majorities in Congress to pass Build Back Better now.

"The entire western United State has been on fire," he said. "Fossil fuels have pushed our planet to a climate catastrophe. Yet, many of our Republican colleagues are ignoring clear, compelling scientific evidence. We have the Democrat majority, and we know what needs to happen. But our path to stopping a catastrophic cycle is narrowing today. We need to act and we need to act boldly to combat our climate crisis head on."

"Building back better also means building back more sustainable."