To: Szaro, Deb[Szaro.Deb@epa.gov]
From: EnergyGuardian
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Subject: Inhofe cries foul as EPA, CEQ decline to testify on UN talks

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Energy and environment headlines for the morning of Friday, October 16, 2015

Inhofe cries foul as EPA, CEQ decline testimony on UN talks

By Kevin Rogers

The Republican leader of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee is working to corral top Obama administration officials to testify at a hearing on December's United Nations climate negotiations, and he isn't buying their excuses for not attending.

Chairman Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., has been rebuffed by the State Department, the Environmental Protection Agency and the White House Council on Environmental Quality in

his effort to obtain witnesses to testify on the U.S. climate commitment, at a hearing on the negotiations next Tuesday.

Initially, Inhofe and committee Republicans had planned to have a joint hearing into the negotiations with a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee, but Democrats on the latter committee objected, leading both committees to pursue individual hearings.

"The Obama administration and Senate Democrats have made it extremely difficult to provide necessary and appropriate Congressional oversight to the president's international climate negotiations," Inhofe said in a statement.

Inhofe is pressing for information on how the U.S. plans to cut its carbon emissions by 26 to 28 percent from 2005 levels by 2025, the official U.S. contribution to the Paris negotiations.

While Todd Stern, the State Department's special envoy for climate change, will speak at a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee hearing on Tuesday, he declined to attend the separate EPW hearing unless EPA and CEQ officials joined.

CEQ staff has told Inhofe that they won't play a role in the negotiations, and EPA Associate Administrator Laura Vaught, in a Tuesday letter, said that the agency wasn't suited to speak to diplomatic efforts nor how the commitment was calculated.

"It is my understanding that you are seeking a witness who can speak to the development of the emissions reduction numbers, and given that neither the entirety of the domestic climate policies, nor the development of the of the total number are within the purview of the agency, I respectfully continue to assert that the agency does not have a witness who can speak to the issues that are the topic of this hearing," she wrote.

Vaught also contended that the agency has been more than forthcoming with Inhofe's committee, noting that top EPA officials have testified eight times this year, including three separate appearances by Administrator Gina McCarthy.

Inhofe argued that that argument wasn't acceptable, as the agency's Clean Power Plan and oil and gas methane regulations have been touted as part of the administration's greenhouse gas reduction commitment.

"Although we are not asking EPA to testify to all the domestic policies making up the 26-28% of greenhouse gas, EPA's contribution is substantial," he wrote to McCarthy Thursday. "EPA representatives have appeared numerous times in international setting discussing EPA's role in the President's Climate Action Plan and how its domestic policies meet the U.S. commitments at Paris."

He made a similar argument in a letter to CEQ Managing Director Christy Goldfuss, noting that the agency's guidance on improving efficiency federal operations were included as part of the commitment.

He also pressed Stern to reconsider, noting that State Department officials had appeared before the committee without EPA or CEQ officials on several occasions over the past two decades.

"Your participation is consistent with this practice," he wrote.

Inhofe pressed all three agencies to submit a list of officials planning to attend the December negotiations, as well as officials who have attended any preliminary meetings.

A day before the hearings, the White House plans to hold a summit with business and science leaders on the Paris negotiations, featuring remarks from Vice President Joe Biden, Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, White House Science and Technology Policy Director John Holdren and White House Senior Advisor Brian Deese.

Quick Links

Oil companies pledge support for Paris climate deal

Former coal executive begins testifying against ex-CEO boss

Companies make big electric vehicle promises in California

Tribes outline proposal for national monument in Utah

Conservative Canadian leader fighting to stay in power

French president in Iceland to see global warming's damage

Alaska OKs hunting of musk oxen stranded on sea ice

UAE to US lawmaker: We have a right to enrich uranium, too

Oil gains on profit taking after days of declines

Banks cashing in as drillers scramble to raise cash

TVA could get NRC license to operate new Watts-Bar reactor within weeks

Jacksonville increasingly turning to natural gas for transportation

Schlumberger to keep cutting as oil recovery delayed: CEO

Hawaii move to end net metering draws mixed response

Hydropower good alternative to nuclear, says Massachusetts energy boss

Pickens in court after losing Canadian wind power battle

Drilling firm loses $3.5M to phishing scam

Upcoming Events

Oil companies pledge support for Paris climate deal

By The Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — The chief executives of 10 of the world's biggest oil and gas companies have pledged support for an "effective" deal to fight global warming at a Paris conference next month.

In a statement Friday, the CEOs of BP, Shell, Saudi Aramco, Total, Repsol, Statoil, Eni, Petroelos Mexicanos, Reliance Industries and BG Group said they recognize greenhouse gas emissions trends are inconsistent with the ambition to keep warming below a level many consider dangerous.

Burning coal, oil and gas for energy is a key emissions source.

The companies offered to help by reducing flaring and methane emissions from oil and gas operations. They also called for replacing coal with cleaner-burning natural gas in power generation.

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Former coal executive begins testifying against ex-CEO boss

By Jonathan Matisse

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — A former coal executive who was dealt a prison sentence for mine violations began testifying Thursday in the criminal trial for his old boss, ex-Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship.

On the stand in Charleston federal court under a plea deal, former Massey subsidiary president David Hughart began describing Blankenship's push for coal production. Defense attorneys countered by noting memos that Blankenship and other managers sent to Hughart honing in on safety priorities.

In 2013, Hughart was sentenced to 3 1/2 years in prison for conspiring in an illegal scheme to warn miners and other subsidiaries of surprise safety inspections. Hughart implicated Blankenship in the conspiracy during his plea hearing.

Hughart's conviction stemmed from a wide probe into an explosion in 2010 at Massey's Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia, which killed 29 men. The same investigation led prosecutors up the corporate ladder to Blankenship. Hughart is the first of several Massey upper managers expected to testify against Blankenship.

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Companies make big electric vehicle promises in California

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Corporate and government leaders gathered Thursday in Los Angeles to announce that hundreds more electric vehicles will be coming to California roads — and they'll have hundreds more places to charge up.

Navy and Marine Corps bases in the state will get 450 of the zero-pollution vehicles, while several major utilities will add hundreds more vehicles or charging stations. Large businesses including Coca-Cola also announced similar commitments.

Californians have been early adopters of electric vehicles, and their elected leaders have set policies to get 1 million zero- or low-emission vehicles on the road.

Mary Nichols, the chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board, hailed the promise to increase charging stations, saying that the concern an electric vehicle will run out of juice is a major barrier to widespread adoption of the vehicles.

Tribes outline proposal for national monument in Utah

By Felicia Fonseca

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — Tribal leaders in the Southwest outlined a proposal Thursday to designate a section of southeastern Utah as a national monument, seeking to become partners with the federal government in managing their ancestral homeland.

The proposed Bears Ears National Monument is named for twin buttes that overlook Cedar Mesa. The 1.9 million-acre area would be bordered to the south by the Navajo Nation and to the west by Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Canyonlands National Park. The

Manti-La Sal National Forest would make up part of the eastern boundary.

American Indian and conservation groups say the area is under constant threat by looting of cultural objects, off-road vehicle use and destruction of gravesites — affronts to tribes' ancestors, they say, and impediments to communities' ability to heal. A handful of tribes submitted a proposal to President Barack Obama's administration asking that he use his power under the Antiquities Act to proclaim the area a national monument and honor the tribes' inherent connection with the land.

"It is not a matter of romanticism or political correctness," the proposal reads. "Native people always have, and we do now, conceive of and relate to the natural world in a different way than does the larger society."

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Conservative Canadian leader fighting to stay in power

By Rob Gillies

TORONTO (AP) — Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper's nearly 10 years in power could end next week, along with his dream of shattering Canada's image as a liberal bastion.

Harper, one of the longest-serving Western leaders, is seeking a rare fourth term in Monday's election but polls show him narrowly trailing Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, the son of late Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, one of Canada's most charismatic politicians.

A Trudeau victory could ease Canada's tensions with the administration of President Barack Obama, whose reluctance to approve the Keystone XL pipeline has damaged ties between the two major trading partners. While Trudeau supports the Alberta-to-Texas pipeline, it's not a do-or-die issue like it is for Harper, who represents a district in oil-rich Alberta.

The pipeline is important to Canada, which needs infrastructure to export its growing oil sands production. But Harper's unease with Obama goes deeper, said Robert Bothwell, a Canadian history professor at the University of Toronto.

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A message from America's Natural Gas Alliance

Clean is Powerful. Natural gas helps Georgia Power's plant generate electricity with 50% fewer emissions. Think about it.

Learn more at www.thinkaboutit.org.

French president in Iceland to see global warming's damage

By The Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The French president will take a few steps on an Icelandic glacier to experience firsthand the damage caused by global warming, ahead of major U.N. talks on climate change in Paris this year.

Francois Hollande is heading Friday to the shrinking Solheimajokull glacier, where the ice has retreated by more than 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) since annual measurements began in 1931.

The melting of Iceland's glaciers increases flood risks and may threaten its electricity supply which is primarily generated by water power.

Iceland generates 100 percent of its electricity with renewables, including 75 percent from hydropower and 25 percent from geothermal power.

In meetings with Iceland's president and prime minister, and in a speech, Hollande is expected to express concerns regarding the exploitation of the Arctic's riches.

Alaska OKs hunting of musk oxen stranded on sea ice

By Dan Joling

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Alaska big game officials have legalized an unusual hunt that will take a boat and a bold hand.

Starting Thursday, Alaska residents can harvest musk oxen that wander onto Bering Sea ice and become stranded when floes break and drift off.

Musk oxen stranded on ice are doomed to drown or starve, said Patrick Jones, assistant state area biologist.

"This occurs every couple of years," Jones said from his office in Bethel. "It just seems like a waste for them not to harvest these animals."

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UAE to US lawmaker: We have a right to enrich

Oil gains on profit taking after days of declines

uranium, too

By Deb Riechmann

WASHINGTON (AP) — Amid fears of an atomic arms race in the Middle East, a senior United Arab Emirates official has told a top U.S. lawmaker that it too might seek the right to enrich uranium that Iran has asserted under the recently signed nuclear deal.

The landmark Iran accord to curb its nuclear weapons in exchange for economic sanctions relief allows Tehran to enrich uranium. In barely noticed testimony last month, Rep. Ed Royce, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the UAE's ambassador in Washington, Yousef al-Otaiba, had informed him in a telephone call that the country no longer felt bound by its previous nuclear agreement with the United States.

"He told me, 'Your worst enemy has achieved this right to enrich. It's a right to enrich now that your friends are going to want, too, and we won't be the only country,' " Royce, a California Republican, said in a phone interview with The Associated Press, elaborating on his testimony.

In a 2009 pact with the UAE, the United States agreed to share materials, technology and equipment for producing nuclear energy. In the accord — known as a 123 Agreement — the UAE made a bold pledge not to enrich uranium or reprocess spent fuel to extract plutonium, two pathways to an atomic weapon.

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Oil gains on profit taking after days of declines

Oil rose early Friday as traders looked to take advantage of a week where prices slumped almost ten percent on signals the global supply glut was set to continue. U.S. benchmark crude for November delivery increased 60 cents to $46.98 a barrel in electronic trading on the Nymex, while in London December Brent was 44 cents higher to $50.17, Reuters reports.

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Banks cashing in as drillers scramble to raise cash

Banks and lenders have been making money on the deals as drillers sell stock and assets to raise cash to pay their growing debt in a period of low oil prices, Bloomberg reports.

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TVA could get NRC license to operate new Watts-Bar reactor within weeks

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has written a letter to the Tennessee Valley Authority,

saying that its Watts Bar-2 unit has the correct permits and is likely to be operated properly, opening the door to issuing an operating license for the reactor, Platts reports.

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Jacksonville increasingly turning to natural gas for transportation

In Jacksonville, vehicles, ships and even locomotives are increasingly are being powered by natural gas, The Florida Times-Union reports.

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Schlumberger to keep cutting as oil recovery delayed: CEO

After third quarter profits dropped 49 percent as a result of low prices, Schlumberger CEO Paal Kibsgaard says the world's biggest oil field services firm will keep cutting spending, although he didn't specify whether more jobs will be eliminated, FuelFix reports.

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Hawaii move to end net metering draws mixed response

While some solar companies are sanguine about the Hawaii Public Utilities Commission decision to close net metering programs to new customers, the head of the local Sierra Club chapter slammed the move, Pacific Business News reports.

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Hydropower good alternative to nuclear, says Massachusetts energy boss

Massachusetts is scrambling to find low-carbon energy with the impending closure of the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station, and state Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton believes hydropower offers a "cost competitive" alternative, the Boston Herald reports.

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Pickens in court after losing Canadian wind power battle

T. Boone Pickens' Mesa Power is waging a legal battle against NextEra Energy, alleging that Ontario's decision to award $3.8 billion in wind power contracts to the company was based on favoritism after the Florida-based firm gave $18,600 in donations to the Liberal Party in Canada, The New York Times reports.

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Drilling firm loses $3.5M to phishing scam

A western Pennsylvania drilling firm was among those losing money to a scammer through Bugat malware, according to prosecutors, who said Andrey Ghinkul has been arrested in Cyprus in the case and is awaiting extradition to the U.S., The Associated Press reports.

More

Upcoming Events

- Oct. 16, Washington: Energy Information Administration Administrator Adam Sieminski to discuss the agency's Winter Fuels Outlook at an event hosted by the United States Association for Energy Economics. 12:00 pm , 425 7th St., NW
- Oct. 16, Washington: The Brookings Institution to hold a panel discussion to examine the 10-year anniversary of the Renewable Fuel Standard and the program's economic and environmental impacts. 10:30 am , 1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW.

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