

Sen. Manchin Urges Mines To Push Back On Emission Standards

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DENVER (AP) — The Democratic senator leading the battle against the White House's strategy to fight climate change urged the mining industry on Tuesday to speak out about coal's role in providing affordable, reliable electricity to the country to help combat strict new emissions rules for coal-fired power plants.

Speaking to the National Western Mining Conference in Denver, Sen. Joe Manchin said the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is not being reasonable in proposing that future coal plants reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions by capturing and storing carbon. Manchin and other opponents say such technology is years away from being commercially viable.

"They're hearing us loud and clear. I just need more voices," he said of the Obama administration.

Manchin said taking coal out of the mix of energy sources used in the United States doesn't make sense when more coal is now used in China — about 1 billion tons a year in the U.S. compared with 4 billion tons in China.

Coal provides nearly 40 percent of the nation's electricity. Power plants account for about a third of U.S. greenhouse emissions that contribute to global warming.

Manchin and U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., are sponsoring a bill that would only let the EPA impose regulation standards that have been achieved for 12 straight months at six domestic power plants. The bill has drawn the support of Democrats from energy-producing states including Sens. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota and Mary Landrieu of Louisiana. Manchin said is still working to add co-sponsors and hasn't asked for the support of Majority Leader Harry Reid yet.

Although he agrees with Republicans that the Obama administration is waging a war on coal, he said he won't consider switching parties to give the GOP control of the Senate this year.

"I am a proud West Virginia Democrat. I am not a Washington Democrat," said Manchin, first elected in a special election in 2010 after the death of Robert C. Byrd.

After his speech, Manchin said he's not a denier of climate change. He first turned a reporter's question about how history will view his support for coal back at him, asking whether he would like to have a lower standard of living without fossil fuels before answering for himself. "I'm hoping history will still be around because we have the energy we need," he said.

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