Will we get the change we need on energy?

Senate debates plan
to repower America

As the U.S. Senate considers historic energy legislation, we’re building support to ensure that we pass a bill that sets us on the path to repower America with clean energy.

The House of Representatives’ approval of the American Clean Energy and Security Act this summer marked a clear break from the inaction that characterized the federal government’s response to global warming during the past eight years. If the Senate follows suit this fall, we’ll see billions of dollars invested in energy efficiency and renewable power, new green buildings sprouting up across America, and significant, mandatory reductions in carbon pollution.

It’s not perfect

Still, the energy bill passed by the House doesn’t do all that’s necessary. In order to win enough votes for passage, the bill’s sponsors agreed to compromises that benefit oil and coal companies, agribusiness and other interests at the expense of taxpayers and the environment. But we can’t wait any longer to get started fighting global warming. And this bill has the potential to transform our energy systems. That’s why we decided to support and work extremely hard for passage of the bill.

Building support for change

Despite the concessions, the vote in the House was close, with just a seven vote margin in favor of the legislation. Five members of Minnesota’s delegation voted in favor of the bill. Working along with other members of our national federation, Environment America, we focused much of our energy on building support among citizens and key constituencies that could influence the deciding votes.

We educated citizens and lawmakers on the consequences of inaction or further delay. For example, our research showed that lower crop yields resulting from climate change could cost corn growers in Minnesota $135 million each year. Nationally, the toll could reach roughly $1.4 billion because of lower corn yields.

And we went door-to-door and reached out online to raise awareness and give citizens a chance to make their voices heard, through the more than 12,000 petition signatures we gathered across the state this summer.

Links to additional content are posted in the online version of the newsletter: www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org/newsletters/fall09

Visit www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org/action/repower-america-petition to sign the petition to repower America.
**Recent action**

### Green light for cleaner cars

Earlier this year, Environment Minnesota worked with Rep. Melissa Hortman and Sen. John Marty to encourage the Legislature to adopt a Clean Cars standard that would put more fuel-efficient cars on the road, keeping the air cleaner—25 percent of Minnesota’s carbon dioxide pollution comes from the transportation sector—and saving Minnesotans money at the pump.

Unfortunately, Minnesota lawmakers failed to act and the fuel efficiency standard was never adopted.

However, in May, President Barack Obama announced the first-ever federal standard for vehicle efficiency, which mandates that new cars and light trucks in every state—even those that have traditionally lagged behind in efficiency without federal rules—average 35.5 miles per gallon. By the time the mandate takes effect in 2016, Minnesotans will have many more fuel-efficient options.

### Minnesota’s energy future not looking nuclear

Environment Minnesota and its allies were part of a victory this spring that will keep residents and future generations safe from the potential dangers and heavy disposal burdens of nuclear power. The Minnesota Legislature voted in April against repealing the 15-year-old ban on construction of new nuclear power plants in the state.

Lawmakers listened when we made the case that expanding nuclear power production is the least desirable option for our state, especially when safer and more cost-effective solutions abound.

Environment Minnesota applauds Rep. Bill Hilty and Sen. Yvonne Prettner Solon for rejecting the repeal, and asks the Pawlenty administration to provide practical, homegrown solutions to our energy problems, including building transmission lines for wind power and exploring solar power.
There’s progress to report on our efforts to protect some of our most treasured natural places. This past summer, officials in the Obama administration issued a temporary halt to several Bush-era policies that put the interests of mining and logging industries before our country’s natural heritage.

**Mining reprieve at the Grand Canyon**

As we’ve reported, mining companies have staked more than 1,000 claims within just five miles of Grand Canyon National Park. The toxic chemicals used in hardrock mining—including arsenic and cyanide—pose a major threat to the health of the Colorado River, which cuts through the Grand Canyon, and also to the well-being of the canyon’s tourists and wildlife. (Hardrock mining has degraded approximately 40 percent of the headwaters that provide drinking water to communities across the West, according to EPA estimates.)

In July, President Obama’s Interior Secretary, Ken Salazar, announced a two-year hold on any new mining leases within an area of more than 1,000 acres of public land surrounding the Grand Canyon.

We celebrated the announcement; now we’re joining forces with the rest of our national federation, Environment America, to call for a permanent ban and to push Congress to protect all of America’s treasured natural areas from destructive mining practices.

**Time out on logging**

In the early months of the Obama administration, our staff discovered that Bush administration holdovers within the Forest Service were still moving ahead with plans to approve logging, mining and road-building in national forests in Colorado, Alaska, Idaho and Oregon.

In April, we documented these findings in a report, “Quietly Paving Paradise,” and urged Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, who oversees our national forests, to put a stop to this major threat to our wild forests. Thanks in part to the visibility we brought to the issue, Secretary Vilsack called a “time-out” on these destructive activities. Applications for logging, mining, drilling or road-building in nearly 50 million acres of our most pristine national forests will now require his personal approval.

And in August, a U.S. appeals court decided that Bush-era rollbacks of protections in roadless forests should be overturned. That’s good news for America’s 155 national forests, including Chippewa National Forest.

But nothing’s settled until a permanent moratorium on mining, logging and road-building is enacted. That’s why we’re calling on Secretary Vilsack to officially declare our national forests once again off limits to these destructive activities, a call echoed by Environment Minnesota supporters and thousands of online activists from our sister organizations across the country in e-mails to Secretary Vilsack this spring and summer.

To learn more about our preservation work and current campaigns, please visit: www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org/preservation.

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**Protecting our 10,000 lakes**

Whether it’s an afternoon swim at Lake Calhoun, or canoeing on a family vacation up north, our 10,000 Lakes are part of what makes Minnesota a great place to live, work and play.

But our lakes are only as pure as the streams that feed them and the wetlands that help keep them clean. A pair of court rulings has left nearly half of Minnesota’s streams and thousands of acres of wetlands vulnerable to chemical dumping and paving.

But a solution is on the way: the Clean Water Restoration Act, now in Congress, would expand the protections of the federal Clean Water Act to all of our lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands. But powerful lobbyists for developers and corporate agribusinesses are fighting it.

Minnesota holds the key: Sen. Al Franken’s support will be critical to break a threatened filibuster, and Rep. Jim Oberstar chairs the committee that reviews the bill in the House.

Environment Minnesota is working with our national delegation and Congress to ensure that all of our waterways are protected from all types of pollution.
We all know we waste a lot of energy—at home, at work and at school. But with practical, specific improvements in efficiency, Americans could save as much as $500 billion on wasted energy costs between now and 2030, along with a considerable reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. Energy consumption by residential and commercial buildings is projected to grow by 16 percent in the next 20 years, creating an additional 323 million metric tons of carbon dioxide—equivalent to running 80 coal-fired power plants for a year.

But we have a chance to remodel our policies and save energy and money: Environment Minnesota’s new report, “Building a Better Future,” outlines policy steps that local and federal officials can take right now to move toward zero-pollution, highly efficient homes and businesses. The simple but effective measures include tightening efficiency codes by about 30 percent, reinforcing them, and retrofitting existing buildings with high-quality materials. About 75 percent of America’s buildings will be either new or renovated by 2040.

Guide for a zero-pollution future

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Strong local and state building codes can help put Minnesota on track for all new buildings to be zero-energy by 2030.