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## **E.P.A. Backs Bush Plan to Cut Air Pollution by Power Plants**

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 27 - After its apparent demise in Congress six months ago, the Bush administration's plan to reduce air pollution from power plants returned to life on Thursday as the Environmental Protection Agency said the plan would cost less than competing proposals.

The assessment came after Stephen L. Johnson, the agency administrator, presented members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee with a detailed comparison of the administration plan, known as Clear Skies, and several others. All of the bills that were analyzed by the E.P.A. staff are intended to curb emissions of nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide and mercury.

Mr. Johnson concluded that any legislation was preferable to the current regulations, which apply only to the eastern half of the country and have come under a barrage of legal challenges. But in defending legislation as a preferred alternative to regulations because statute is less vulnerable to litigation, he argued only for the administration approach although he hinted that he would be open to compromise.

"A number of legislative proposals are on the table," he told reporters after his meeting on Capitol Hill. "The Clear Skies proposal is far superior to regulation and litigation. There are a number of strengths and a number of issues with each proposal, but I look forward to working with Congress to work them out."

Mr. Johnson's latest expression of support for the administration plan drew the same reactions as when he testified for it earlier in the year. Industry groups applauded him; environmental groups attacked him. And committee members seemed little swayed from their original positions.

"Now that we have an apples-to-apples comparison of our legislative proposals along with the existing E.P.A. regulations, I feel we can again move forward with reaching an agreement with the other side on a way to pass a cost-effective Clear Skies bill this Congress," said the committee chairman, Senator James M. Inhofe, Republican of [Oklahoma](#) and sponsor of the administration plan.

But Senator [James M. Jeffords](#) of [Vermont](#), an independent who sponsored a competing measure, said the agency analysis failed to convince him that the administration plan was superior. He said it was "no better and in some respects worse," than current regulations under the Clean Air Act.

Senator Thomas R. Carper, Democrat of [Delaware](#), who sponsored yet another bill, said: "We can do better than the president's Clear Skies plan. The administration's own analysis shows that Clear Skies doesn't clean the air any better than what we've already got on the books."

Mr. Inhofe's bill was the only approach to reducing emissions that reached a committee vote, failing in April on a 9-to-9 tie. Some committee members did not want to vote for the bill without the detailed comparison with other plans. Some opponents wanted legislation that included limits on emissions of carbon dioxide, a chemical that scientists believe contributes to global warming. The bills sponsored by Mr. Jeffords and Mr. Carper included carbon dioxide caps; Mr. Inhofe's bill did not.

Mr. Johnson said his preference for the administration approach was based on a more favorable balance between projected costs to industry and projected health benefits. He said the Jeffords and Carper bills were too expensive, even though they would generate greater savings in health care costs.

Using the impact of various proposals by 2010 as an example, the E.P.A. estimated that the administration plan would cost \$2.8 billion in spending for new emission controls and generate up to \$78 billion in reduced health care costs. The Carper bill would cost industry \$10.5 billion and create health care savings of up to \$128 billion, and the Jeffords bill would cost industry \$41.1 billion with projected health care savings of up to \$162 billion.

The health benefits might even be higher because they reflect only estimated decreases in sulfur dioxide, which is soot, and nitrogen oxides, which form smog.

Mr. Johnson said higher costs for industry could lead to rising consumer energy costs but deferred a full debate on the issue to lawmakers.

Critics of the administration plan found at least one encouraging sign in the analysis. It showed that controls for carbon dioxide in the Carper bill would cost only \$1 per ton, undermining a common argument that reducing carbon dioxide emissions would drive up electricity prices.

"The administration can no longer hide behind the boogeyman of high electricity prices to justify its do-nothing policy on global warming," said John Stanton of the National Environmental Trust. "With that admission, the administration crossed a line that can't be uncrossed."