

President Obama suggested that he would urge the Senate to pass a version of the bill the House passed last year on clean energy. Those bills will finally put a price on carbon emissions to help address climate change. The president sought to sell the bill as part of the jobs and innovation agenda, which was probably smart. With the Congress tied up dealing with healthcare, progress has been stalled on the energy/environment bill, which promises to be just as if not more controversial and far-reaching as the health care bill. If President Obama can rally Democrats to pass health care legislation, then he has a chance, albeit a small one, to advance the clean energy bill before the midterm elections, but time may not be on his side.

Unlike many of President Bush's State of the Union addresses, President Obama made little reference to global health issues, making mention of them in two lines near the end of the speech.

"But to create more of these clean energy jobs, we need more production, more efficiency, more incentives. And that means building a new generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants in this country. (Applause.) It means making tough decisions about opening new offshore areas for oil and gas development. (Applause.) It means continued investment in advanced biofuels and clean coal technologies. (Applause.) And, yes, it means passing a comprehensive energy and climate bill with incentives that will finally make clean energy the profitable kind of energy in America. (Applause.)

"I am grateful to the House for passing such a bill last year. (Applause.) And this year I'm eager to help advance the bipartisan effort in the Senate. (Applause.)

"I know there have been questions about whether we can afford such changes in a tough economy. I know that there are those who disagree with the overwhelming scientific evidence on climate change. But here's the thing -- even if you doubt the evidence, providing incentives for energy-efficiency and clean energy are the right thing to do for our future -- because the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the nation that leads the global economy. And America must be that nation. (Applause.)

"We have gone from a bystander to a leader in the fight against climate change. We're helping developing countries to feed themselves, and continuing the fight against HIV/AIDS. And we are launching a new initiative that will give us the capacity to respond faster and more effectively to bioterrorism or an infectious disease -- a plan that will counter threats at home and strengthen public health abroad."

Obama's SOTU also suggested that he would be open to compromises on nuclear power and some limited offshore oil drilling if it meant that some Republicans would cross party lines and support the clean energy bill. That was a signal to Senator Lindsay Graham of South Carolina to see if and Joe Lieberman might be able to bring wavering Democrats and a few Republicans into the fold to support Senate passage of a cap-and-trade bill this year.