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Climate bill needed for U.S. security, ex-officials insist

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By Renee Schoof | McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — America's national security is at risk unless Congress and the Obama administration end partisan wrangling and agree on legislation to reduce U.S. contributions to climate change, a bipartisan group of former presidential advisers, cabinet members, senators and military leaders said Tuesday.

The energy and climate debate is divisive, but it's possible for the government to devise a "clear, comprehensive, realistic and broadly bipartisan plan to address our role in the climate change crisis," declared the Partnership for a Secure America, a group that seeks a centrist, bipartisan approach to security and foreign policy.

It broadly sketched a plan for emissions reductions, less dependence on foreign oil, more renewable energy and aid to poor countries that will be hard hit by inevitable climate changes. "Doing so now will help avoid humanitarian disasters and political instability in the future that could ultimately threaten the security of the U.S. and our allies," the statement said. Failure to lead, it added, would give the U.S. little leverage in pending international negotiations for a global emissions reduction agreement.

Among the 32 who signed the statement were former Republican senators Howard Baker of Tennessee, John Danforth of Missouri, Slade Gorton of Washington, Nancy Kassebaum Baker of Kansas, Warren Rudman of New Hampshire and John Warner of Virginia.

Among those who served Republican presidents were George Shultz, secretary of state, and Robert McFarlane, national security adviser during the presidency of Ronald Reagan; Thomas Kean, a former New Jersey governor who was the chairman of the 9-11 Commission; and Christine Todd Whitman, a former New Jersey governor who led the Environmental Protection Agency under George W. Bush.

Democrats included former Secretary of State Warren Christopher and National Security Advisers Sandy Berger and Tony Lake (all of the Clinton administration); Ted Sorenson, special counsel to President Kennedy; former Sens. Gary Hart and Timothy Wirth of Colorado and Sam Nunn of Georgia; and former Indiana Rep. Lee Hamilton, who was the vice chairman of the 9-11 Commission.

Their prodding for U.S. leadership on energy use came as Congress returned to work from its summer recess focused overwhelmingly on overhauling health care. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., plans to schedule action on legislation to put mandatory limits on emissions later this fall, before December negotiations in Copenhagen toward a new international climate accord — although concerns are rising that the Senate schedule may slip owing to its crowded legislative agenda.

The House of Representatives narrowly passed an energy and climate bill in June by 219-212, with most Democrats voting for it and most Republicans against.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, an independent from Connecticut who supports mandatory emissions limits and increased support for clean energy, said at a briefing Tuesday that the Senate bill must give more money than the House bill does to the nuclear energy industry and for the capture and storage of carbon dioxide emissions from coal burning to win support from undecided senators.

The House bill would raise the money from sale of allowances for greenhouse gas emissions. A Senate draft hasn't been released yet.

Retired Vice Adm. Dennis McGinn said that global warming links economic, energy, climate and national security challenges.

Climate change threatens to drag the U.S. into conflicts in unstable regions over water, energy and other resources, McGinn said. It will create more frequent natural and humanitarian disasters, and as people around the world demand the essentials for life and unstable governments fail to cope, terrorists will gain room to operate, he said.

"Some may be surprised to hear former generals and admirals talk about climate change and clean energy," McGinn said. "But they shouldn't be, because in the military we learn quickly that reducing threats and vulnerabilities

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