

14022 **Senate Democrats pull all-night speechathon on climate change**

By Suzanne Goldenberg

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About 30 Senate Democrats wrapped up nearly 15 hours of speeches on climate change in a very public embrace of a cause many once fled as political poison.

The all-nighter for the climate – a carefully orchestrated event endorsed by the White House, Democratic donors and environmental groups – was the 35th overnight session in Senate history.

The event made recent political history too with the most senior senators in the Democratic party, including majority leader Harry Reid, now publicly identifying with a cause they shunned in 2010, after failing to get a climate bill through Congress.

The senators who organised the all-night event acknowledged it had no chance of advancing the prospects for a climate bill in the immediate future.

That would be “premature”, Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island told a call with reporters. “Tonight is not about a specific legislative proposal.”

But the night’s line-up of senators, impressively equipped with oversized charts, talking points about climate science, and a battery of facts about climate impacts in each of their states, was a start towards making climate change part of the main political conversation.

By the time the last speaker, Bill Nelson of Florida, took to the floor, anyone who made it through the night on C-Span would have had a thorough briefing on real-time climate impacts from wildfires in New Mexico to sea-level rise in Virginia and Florida.

There was little mention of the environmental issue that has galvanised thousands of protesters: the Keystone XL pipeline project.

Activists have been pressing Obama to block the project – a position shared by only one senator, Tim Kaine of Virginia. “It would be a very good thing if the president right now rejected the use of tar sands oil in the Keystone pipeline,” Kaine said in his speech.

Even with those gaps, as the night wore on, it was possible to get an idea of how the Democrats intend to frame climate change in next November’s mid-term elections and in the presidential campaign in 2016.

That’s a departure from the 2012 presidential elections when the White House and congressional candidates ran from any mention of climate change – until hurricane Sandy made the topic unavoidable.

Democrats also accused the oil billionaire Koch brothers of funding a misinformation campaign meant to discredit climate science.

The Democrats said that anti-science, anti-climate position was what had stopped Congress from taking up climate change until now.

(398 words)