

News Release

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Lutherans, Others Urge Congress and White House to Address Climate Change 09-252-JD

WASHINGTON (ELCA) -- In a public demonstration of support for climate change legislation, faith leaders gathered Nov. 5 here on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) joined several other religious organizations in co-sponsoring the event which included a ceremony of prayer, music and testimony reflecting on the need for climate change legislation.



The current climate change legislation in the U.S. Senate is "a mixed bag" according to Mary Minette, director for environmental education and advocacy in the ELCA Washington Office.

"There are some things we do support," she said. "It gets good funding for international assistance to people in poverty who are struggling with climate change impacts already. It has pretty robust emissions reductions, not as strong in the short term, but definitely in the long term."

Minette said the bill is not yet complete in the Senate and will need bipartisan support to pass. "There are Republicans outside of the (Senate Environment and Public Works) committee who are reaching out to people -- to Senator Kerry (D-Mass.) primarily, who is one of the authors of the bill -- trying to forge a compromise for legislation that could then be supported by more Republicans," said Minette.

Participants in the event also delivered thousands of "Countdown to Copenhagen" campaign postcards to U.S. Senators.

The "Countdown to Copenhagen" campaign was developed by the National Council of Churches USA and Church World Service to call for U.S. action on the international climate negotiations.

Several ELCA congregations as well as youth from the 2009 ELCA Youth Gathering this past summer participated in the campaign. ELCA members signed more than 3,500 postcards.

Patricia Benson, creation care coordinator for the Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in Minnesota, St. Paul, was one of the activists in the campaign. She said the campaign was "attractive" because of its discipleship response in reducing one's own carbon footprint. Benson also cited the importance of the campaign's goal of engaging with policy makers in coming up with "just and compassionate solutions."

Benson said, "We weren't telling people what to think about it, but challenging people to learn about it and engage in the conversations. We have a Creator and we are participating in the restoration of creation through this process."

"If we do cap and trade and everything else in this country, but we do it alone, it's not going to make a difference. At the same time we can't keep standing here saying,

'Well, I'm not going to do it unless you do it'," said Benson. "We're hoping that America will take a lead on it."

This coming December world leaders will meet in Copenhagen for international talks about climate change. The summit participants are expected to discuss and finalize an agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol. The protocol is a mandatory agreement among nations to reduce global emissions and expires in 2012, according to Minette.

However, she said there are still some "major areas of disagreement," and an actual agreement may not be signed. Minette will be attending the Copenhagen Summit as a delegate with the Lutheran World Federation.

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Audio of comments by Patricia Benson is at <http://media.ELCA.org/audionews/091109Benson.mp3> and by Mary Minette is at <http://media.ELCA.org/audionews/091109Minette.mp3> on the ELCA Web site.

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