

The influence game: Excuse me! Lobby wins on burps

By **DINA CAPIELLO**
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WASHINGTON — One contributor to global warming — bigger than coal mines, landfills and sewage treatment plants — is being left out of efforts by the Obama administration and House Democrats to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

Cow burps.
Belching from the nation's 170 million cattle, sheep and pigs produces about one-quarter of the methane released in the U.S. each year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. That makes the hoofed critters the largest source of the heat-trapping gas.

In part because of an adept farm lobby campaign that equates government regulation with a cow tax, the gas that farm animals pass is exempt from legislation being considered by Congress to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

The EPA under President Barack Obama has said it has no plans to regulate the gas, even though the agency recently included methane among six greenhouse gases it believes are endangering human health and welfare.

The message circulating in Internet chat rooms, the halls of Congress and farm co-ops had America's farms facing financial ruin if the EPA required them to purchase air-pollution permits like power plants and factories do. The cost of those permits amounted to a cow tax, farm groups argued.

"It really has taken on a life of its own," said Rick Krause, a lobbyist with the American Farm Bureau Federation, which coined the term cow tax and spread it to farmers across the country. "This is something that people understand. All that we have to say is that (cows) are the next step with these proposed permit fees. And people are still talking about it."

Administration officials and House Democratic leaders have tried to assure farm groups that they have no intention of regulating cows. That effort, however, has done little to ease the concern of farmers and their advocates in Congress about the toll that regulating greenhouse gases will have on agriculture.

Lawmakers and farm groups are now pressing for the climate legislation to guarantee that farmers will be compensated for taking steps to

reduce greenhouse gases. That could lead to farmers getting paid if their cows pass less gas.

Research has shown that changing cattle diet and boosting efficiency — such as producing the same amount of milk and beef from a smaller herd — can result in less gas, according to Frank M. Mitloehner, an associate professor at the University of California at Davis, who has studied livestock gas for 15 years.

"I don't think livestock should be ignored. Every industry has to play their role," Mitloehner said. But laws designed to reduce emissions from smokestacks and tailpipes won't work with cattle, which can't be fitted with pollution control devices, Mitloehner said.

"The belching is very hard to collect," he said. "You cannot capture these gases."

The climate bill specifically excludes enteric fermentation — the fancy term for the gas created by digestion and expelled largely by burping — from the limit it would place on greenhouse gas emissions. The legislation directs the EPA not to include it among the various sources that could be subject to new performance standards.

EPA administrator Lisa Jackson has called rumors of the cow tax "ridiculous notions" and a "distraction."

On Thursday, Rep. Todd Tihart, R-Kan., successfully added an amendment to the spending bill that covers the EPA to block the agency from including biological processes of livestock — including the release of methane — as part of regulating greenhouse gases.

House aides and EPA officials say that controlling such emissions is unworkable. Cow burps make up about 2 percent of all the climate-altering pollution in the U.S.

But allies of farmers in Congress say the reluctance to step in the cow tax debate has a lot to do with the outcry from the agriculture industry and moderate Democrats from rural states whose votes are needed to pass the bill.

"I think they realized that if you are a Democrat in an agricultural state, a red state, that this is radioactive and I think that is why they have tried scrupulously to reaffirm that they don't have any intention of doing this," said Sen. John Thune, R-S.D. He is sponsoring a bill that would bar the EPA from requiring farmers to get permits for cattle burps.

Thune, whose state is home to a half-million cattle, first heard about the cow tax at a South Dakota Cattlemen Association's conference in early December. Within weeks he introduced his bill and recruited support from New York Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer, whose state boasts three times more cows.

The origins of the cow tax can be traced to last July, when President George W. Bush's EPA released documents outlining how the Clean Air Act could regulate greenhouse gases.

Even though the Bush administration had no intention of using the law, farm groups seized on a single paragraph deep in the comments from various federal agencies. The Agriculture Department warned that if EPA decided to regulate agricultural sources of greenhouse gases, numerous farms would face costly and time-consuming process to acquire permits for barnyard burping.

The Farm Bureau quickly did the math and figured farms would have to pay about \$175 for each dairy cow, \$87.50 per head of beef cattle and \$20 for each hog to purchase permits for emissions.

The cow tax was born.



Joel Troyer photos/www.buydrphotos.com
Super Stock Division racers line up after a rain delay, waiting for their turn on the Soap Box Derby course off of Back Orrville Road.

Hooser

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"I also try to get them excited (to race)," she said.

Esckridge, 16, and her sister, Abby, 11, from Doylestown planned to race today, but drove as Challenger assistants on Saturday.

Challenger Michael Frantz, 16, a Wooster High School freshman, participated in the race for the third time this year, his mother, Maryann, said, noting, "The first year he won the whole thing," earning him a trip to the Soap Box Derby in Akron.

"They wine and dine them (there) and give them gift baskets," she said, recalling how family members gathered for the event.

"All of them are excited to go down (the hill)," Maryann Frantz said. "They all feel like they're winning."

At the bottom of the hill in the afternoon, Crystal Moran of Burbank, who was the 1996 Stock champion, monitored the end of each heat.

Moran continued racing in the Soap Box Derby until 2004, when she was 17 years old. Now she helps run it.

"I love it," she said, "just seeing the kids race ... and the thrill of the race."



Stacey Yutzy celebrates her win in the Challenger Division of the Wayne-Holmes Soap Box Derby Saturday with her mother, Karen.

She also loves the setting off of Back Orrville Road.

"You don't have to worry about as much setting up, and you don't have to worry as much about traffic," Moran said.

Her only concern was the racers, one of whom, Taylor Sands, a Triway High School freshman competing in the Super Stock Division, had hoped to achieve the winner's edge this year.

"I've been second two years in a row," she said. She didn't change her overall technique. Instead, she got a new paint job

on her car and matched her nail polish color to it, she said.

Among the onlookers on the sidelines was Soap Box Derby Queen Ariel Larson, 14, from Triway, watching someone else take her car down the hill.

"Ariel got queen, so she couldn't race," Moran said.

"I'm the pit crew," Don Noble II said, for his son, Nicholas, a Shreve Elementary School fourth-grade student who came in fourth in the Super Stock Division, just after third-place winner, Kyle Hinton, a sixth-grader at Northwestern Middle School.

Windy conditions prevailed for at least part of the afternoon.

"Some people say it can be a factor," Moran said. Should it be at a racer's back, "if (racers) are coming down the hill, they can sit up higher and it pushes (them) down the hill."

"It just depends on everybody's strategy," she said.

Obama

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making them go away," the president said, recalling a theme from the speech he gave in Cairo, Egypt, this month.

"The Iranian people will ultimately judge the actions of their own government," Obama said. "If the Iranian government seeks the respect of the international community, it must respect the dignity of its own people and govern through consent, not coercion."

Obama's comments came as protesters outside the White House waved Iranian flags and denounced Iranian government efforts to suppress the protesters.

Protesters in Iran have

demanding that government cancel and rerun the June 12 elections that ended with a declaration of overwhelming victory for hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Reformist presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi says he won and claimed widespread fraud.

Obama's criticism came one day after both houses of Congress voted overwhelmingly to condemn the actions by the Iranian government against demonstrators and moves to interfere with Internet and cell phone communications. That was seen in part as a veiled criticism of Obama's response, too.

The president already was on record as saying the United

States stood behind those who were seeking justice in a peaceful way. He responded to critics that he hadn't been forceful enough in support of protesters, telling CBS News: "The last thing that I want to do is to have the United States be a foil for those forces inside Iran who would love nothing better than to make this an argument about the United States. That's what they do."

That was Friday, before the conflict in Iran appeared to deepen.

Obama has refrained from passing final judgment on the underlying question of the legitimacy of the election itself, although he has expressed "deep concerns" about it.

Grows

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consists primarily of those types of groups, Flowers said.

The goal of the food bank is to take surplus food donated by companies, of which J.M. Smucker Co., Smith Dairy and Frito Lay are big donors, and get it to people in need. While it strives for accountability, Flowers said it would not let that get in the way of availability.

ACRF serves eight counties, including Wayne and Holmes.

In 2007, Wayne County had 11,234 families below the poverty level, and Holmes County had 3,556, according to figures provided by Flowers. He also said

there were 14,081 families eligible for food stamps in Wayne County, but only around 8,500 were enrolled. In Holmes, 8,563 were eligible, but only 1,071 participated in the program. Flowers said those figures might have something to do with the Amish population in Holmes County.

"They're leaving federal dollars on the table" that could go toward addressing hunger and decreasing the need for emergency food, Flowers said.

LeGrain pointed out ACRF is not a food pantry, rather it provides foods to groups for their pantries.

The second part of the evening was a presentation of various orga-

nizations working with the Interfaith Partnership, which included the Rev. Kevan Franklin of Trinity United Church of Christ; Maj. Mary West of the Salvation Army; John Gareis of the Wayne County Chapter of the American Red Cross; Tessa Walters of InfoLink and Wayne-Holmes Rx; Carolyn Basista of Bridges to Hope; Lydia Stahl of People to People Ministries; Cyndi O'Donnell of Viola Startzman Free Clinic; and Gina Patterson of Every Women's House.

Following the presentations, Sister Joan Radar of St. Anne's Catholic Church in Rittman said the "goodness of people is so profound in this area."

Truck

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"We're set," they both say with confidence.

The convoy left the Wayne County fairgrounds on Wednesday and is expected to arrive in San Francisco on July 8. From there, Mark and Gunnar, as well as Mark's wife, will continue up the Pacific Coast to their home in Portland, Ore.

Mark Sigrist is originally from Millersburg and later, West Salem. He attended the Agricultural Technical Institute many years ago and his family still owns a farm near New Pittsburg.

He hauled the military vehicle to Wayne County on the back of a truck, where he and Gunnar unloaded it and drove it to D.C., to meet up with the convoy.

During the day, the two will drive through towns and villages, meeting countless people along the way. And they'll also spend a lot of time together, including Father's Day.

What they do most, they said, is just talk.

"We talk about stuff that I've maybe never thought to talk to him about before," Mark said, adding "it's a little loud in there and we have to shout some," but they don't mind.

One topic they talk about a lot is the military. Mark was a mechanic in Vietnam and his father, cousins and uncles, as well as his wife's family, all have

extensive military backgrounds. Part of the reason for the cross-country trip is to commemorate their service, according to a plaque the couple display outside of the vehicle.

At night, they try to get acquainted with others in the convoy and the people of the community, and freshen up with a shower when it's available. As for sleeping arrangements, there's a lot to choose from, but the Sigrist's keep it simple.

"There's usually a place like the fairgrounds where we stop and some of us on the convoy have motor homes or travel trailers, there's a couple sleeping in the hotels, some of them sleep in the back of (their) truck, and Gunnar and I pitch a tent," Mark said.

But their tent is a good quality Cabela's tent, and neither of them mind sleeping in it.

"That's part of the adventure," Mark said. "Besides that, we're thrifty."

Gunnar already is planning to share his experience on the historical trip with his teachers back in Oregon. And he hopes to one day become a professional parachuter with the Army.

But for now, he's just content on sharing the time with his father.

"I get to see some of the stories that he's telling about some of these (military) people and it's just a great experience," Gunnar said.

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