



Pinsky and co-author Del. Kumar Barve, the house Democratic leader, proposed a similar but unsuccessful Global Warming Solutions Act last year. It would have created a system of financial rewards and punishments (known as a "cap and trade" system) to force all businesses to reduce their emissions.

The Maryland legislature over the last two year has approved more limited cuts in carbon dioxide pollution from coal-fired power plants and cars. Together, these add up to an expected 25 percent reduction.

The Maryland Chamber of Commerce, Constellation Energy and many Republicans oppose the 90 percent mandate, saying such aggressive regulation could cripple the states economy if other states don't have such limits.

"It would be harmful for employment," said Senate Republican Leader David R. Brinkley. "We have a conscientious business community, and nobody wants to contribute to pollution, but these guys are intent on making Maryland uncompetitive."

Rob Gould, a spokesman for Constellation Energy, the state's biggest owner of power plants, said federal or international regulation of greenhouse gases makes more sense. And he suggested that power shortages could result from excessive state regulation. "Constellation Energy is very supportive of federal and international regulation. Our concern with last year's bill was that it limited the ability to trade to sources inside Maryland. Given that the only way to reduce CO2 from non-nuclear power plants is to run those plants less, our concern remains that a single small state like Maryland cannot meet these aggressive targets without reliability impacts occurring."

The U.S. Congress is considering legislation that would set up a national system of greenhouse gas reductions through a "cap and trade" system. But the Bush administration has opposed any mandatory limits in part because China, India and other economic competitors of the U.S. have refused to impose cuts.

California has approved a law with an 80 percent reduction by midcentury, and Maryland's law is modelled after this proposal. The bill would order state agencies to come up with a variety of regulations to increase energy efficiency, encourage mass transit, discourage the burning of fossil fuels and boost clean energy.

After last year's bill failed, Gov. Martin O'Malley appointed a climate change advisory commission that recommend that the state adopt a California-style program and cut greenhouse gases by 90 percent by 2050. A spokeswoman for O'Malley, Christine Hansen, wouldn't say this evening whether the governor would support the Pinsky/Barve legislation, but said he is going to look "very seriously" at the bill. "The governor knows that we need to work to address global climate change," Hansen said.

Many of the protesters who endured the cold to chant "Stop Global Warming!" said they didn't think the snowfall conflicted with their message. Davey Roegner, a 22 year old student at the University of Maryland College Park, beat on an African Djembe drum to rev up the crowd. He said the snow was a "gift" to remind everyone about how rarely Maryland has been blanketed with beautiful white in recent years as temperatures have increased.

"It's only the second snow of the year, which is very sad," said Rogner, from Silver Spring. "Global warming is the most important issue of our generation. The state of Maryland should be taking a leadership role in it, because of our vulnerability with all our shoreline."

Barve said the snow was a good sign: "At least we have weather appropriate for winter time, finally."

The 18 legislators who "walked the green carpet" to co-sponsor the "Global Warming Solutions Act" included: Senators Frosh, Rosapepe and Pinsky; and Delegates Hecht, Nathan-Pulliam, Cardin, Stein, Bobo, Barve, Carr, Waldstreicher, Manno, Mizeur, Barnes, Kullen, Anderson, Neimann and Ramirez.

Claire Douglass, Maryland director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, told the cheering crowd: "Maryland is the third most vulnerable state in the nation to sea level rise. With over 3,100 miles of coastline, it is our job to protect it."

Dr. Cindy Parker of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health said: "I'm a physician, why am I here for a rally for an environmental bill? It's not an environmental bill, that's why. It's a health bill. This is the biggest threat to our health of anything going on right now, and anything we expect this century. We have to pass this bill for our health and for the health of everybody in the world and our children and their children."

Ted Rouse, an owner of the Baltimore-based development firm Struever Brothers Eccles and Rouse, and a leader of the Chesapeake Sustainable Business Alliance, said: "You can make a profit while looking after the planet. There is opportunity in this bill for business. So business supports this bill as well."

Reached by phone, a spokesman for the Maryland Chamber of Commerce disagreed. Will Burns, director of communications for the chamber, said Maryland should not impose restrictions that companies in Virginia, Pennsylvania and other regional states don't face.

"With an issue like this, it's best not to act unilaterally. It's best to act regionally, so that you're not stepping out on your own," said Burns. "Our economy is not like California's...You certainly would put Maryland at a disadvantage when it takes such radical action alone."

A nonpartisan analysis of last year's proposal, by the Maryland Department of Legislative Services, said the law would impose new regulations on "all businesses, small and large" across the state. "Accordingly, costs could increase significantly, but any such increase cannot be reliably calculated at this time."