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State drops to a C-plus

Romney administration criticized on emissions

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BOSTON— Gov. Mitt Romney's steps to cut emissions that lead to global warming have lowered the state's grade to a C-plus on a report card issued yesterday by environmental advocates evaluating government's efforts to reduce carbon emissions in New England and Eastern Canada.

The criticism follows an announcement by governor's spokesman Jesse Suskin that neither Mr. Romney, Lt. Gov. Kerry Healey nor anyone from the state's executive office of Environmental Affairs would attend a key conference of New England governors and premiers of the Canada's Eastern Maritime Provinces in Newfoundland Friday that is to include discussions on global warming.

Last year, Massachusetts received a B-minus on the report card and Mr. Romney was cited for his announcement of initiatives to conserve energy, reduce reliance on foreign oil and cut emissions. But yesterday the environmentalists accused of him of talking about the issues without implementing the solutions.

"When you look at what has actually happened since the plan's release to reduce global warming pollution from the biggest sources — such as power plants, cars and trucks — progress in Massachusetts has been quite slow," said Jed Thorp, energy organizer for Clean Water Action, one of the groups that rated the regional efforts.

The environmentalists listed steps the state could take to reduce greenhouse gasses toward 1990 levels, a goal set in 2001 by New England states and the Eastern Canadian provinces. Massachusetts Gov. Jane M. Swift signed the agreement that August.

Mr. Romney last year committed the state to meeting that goal by 2010, and to cutting emissions by another 10 percent by 2020. At the time, Mr. Romney said he had not bought into the scientific studies indicating potential dramatic climate shifts from the greenhouse effect, but that he believed conservation and emission control initiatives "are going to save the Commonwealth money" and could stimulate markets for key industries in the state.

Marc Breslow, director of the Massachusetts Climate Coalition, said the C-plus grade represents the coalition's "dissatisfaction with the level of progress the last year." But, he said, it is "too soon to say that there is

a lack of interest. As far as we know the state is still looking to move forward on climate action.”

A report by the coalition said the governor has made some progress, requiring the state to buy Energy Star equipment for state offices and completing purchase of 30 hybrid cars and more than 100 new low-emissions trucks. It noted, however, that Mr. Romney has not yet pushed any final plans to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from the five dirtiest coal burning power plants in the state, or developed a plan to reduce vehicle miles traveled in the state.

The report said the state needs to reverse decreasing ridership on mass transit and should revamp long-term power purchase contracts to allow purchase of electricity from renewable and nonpolluting energy sources

A big test of the state’s commitment to curbing global warming emissions will come this fall when nine states from Maine to Delaware will be asked to sign an agreement to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants in their states.

Carissa L. Williams, a clean-power advocate working with the Regional Environmental Council in Worcester, also reported concerns about a slowed effort to reduce carbon emissions in the state’s second largest city.

She said that during past nine months, more than 200 small businesses and residents from Worcester have signed up for “green choice” electric service through Mass Electric, paying \$6 to \$12 more per month for power that includes a mix of solar, wind, small hydro and biomass power. The Interfaith Power and Light group has been organizing energy audits and conservation programs at Worcester area churches, encouraging the purchase of non-polluting power with conservation savings.

Mayor Timothy P. Murray, who wanted the city to commit to reduce global warming emissions over the past two years, this summer viewed a wind turbine in Dorchester with an eye toward promoting alternative power in the city.

He reportedly is trying to find a way to use photovoltaic panels at the new vocational high school.

However, Ms. Williams said yesterday that Worcester’s efforts have slowed since an initial strong response in 2004. “The city is very well intentioned. They are on track” to develop and implement an action plan to reduce carbon emissions, she said. “But they need to move forward at a faster pace.”

She pointed out that the city administration has yet to form a task force recommended last year to coordinate energy conservation and alternative energy programs.

The top priority now, she added, is to start conserving energy, especially with the soaring energy costs — efforts that could be advanced by a task force.

“It will save them money and help the environment,” she said.