



P. SHAMBROOM/NUKEPHOTO.COM

Research suggests that the present crop of US nuclear warheads should last for at least 80 years.

tal group based in New York. "The arguments with which they won congressional support have fallen apart."

McMillan counters that the RRW has always been about more than just replacing older warheads. "RRW will bring to the stockpile the most modern technologies for safety and security," he says. In addition, he says, the process of

developing and producing the RRW will help transform the weapons complex into a smaller, more responsive one.

If nothing else, the extended shelf-life of the current warheads should allow more time for debate.

**Geoff Brumfiel**

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their hands and say that the judiciary isn't doing anything and Congress needs to step in".

When the Democrats take control of Congress in January, the prediction for the first months is a steady diet of hearings, with bills taking a little longer. No one is quite sure if the votes are there for a tough bill on climate change. "What the elections did, to a large extent, was replace Republican moderates with Democratic moderates," says Manik Roy, director of congressional affairs at the Pew Center on Global Climate Change. "You don't have many more votes. What has changed is who controls the agenda."

Senator Barbara Boxer (Democrat, California), who will

head the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, has promised lots of talk and action on climate change, and on 15 November sent a letter with two other heads of related committees to President Bush, asking for a commitment to "pass meaningful climate change legislation in 2007". Republican Senator (and probable presidential candidate) from Arizona, John McCain, will also undoubtedly reintroduce the McCain-Lieberman Climate Change Act, a cap-and-trade bill, for its third outing.

Frank Maisano, a spokesman for Bracewell & Giuliani, a law firm representing oil and gas industries, cautions that advocates for climate-change

regulation have been overtaken by unrealistic exuberance. The complexity of the issue will push substantive action way past the verdict, he says. "It is not something that is going to be slam-dunked in 12 months."

But even if the rounds of hearings seem to produce nothing but hot air, Roy points out that they will at least educate members of Congress, where, for example, Senator James Inhofe (Republican, Oklahoma) has been holding forth on his view of climate change as some sort of conspiracy theory. "I would not in any way consider it a delay tactic if Congress spends a year holding hearings on this issue," Roy says. **Emma Marris**

## ON THE RECORD

Justice Antonin Scalia

(pictured):

**"Your assertion is that after the pollutant leaves the air and goes up into the stratosphere it is contributing to global warming."**



B. CHILD/AP

James Milkey:

**"Respectfully, Your Honour, it is not the stratosphere. It's the troposphere."**

Justice Scalia:

**"Troposphere, whatever. I told you before I'm not a scientist. That's why I don't want to have to deal with global warming."**

The US Supreme Court tackles climate change (see left).

## OVERHYPED

**Radioactive products**

After the news that Russian ex-spy Alexander Litvinenko was poisoned with polonium-210, a number of blogs and news stories sounded shrill warnings about companies selling polonium-210 over the Internet.

One such company, United Nuclear in Sandia Park, New Mexico, posted a notice on its website explaining that the amounts of polonium-210 it sells are microscopic. The company estimates it would take about 15,000 of its polonium-210 sources to poison someone — at a cost of \$1 million.

"An order for 15,000 sources would look a tad suspicious," the company points out, "considering we sell about one or two sources every three months."