

**CLIMATE:****Greens look forward to bold words on warming in tonight's speech**

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Environmentalists hope President Obama will pick up tonight where he left off during last month's inaugural address, fleshing out his second-term climate change agenda and showing once and for all that the White House no longer views global warming as a political loser.

The wish lists that poured in yesterday were ambitious. The BlueGreen Alliance, a coalition of labor and environmental groups, held a call with reporters yesterday to ask Obama to use his speech to lay out an ambitious agenda of rebuilding the water infrastructure systems and investing in mass transit.

Residents of states affected last year by Superstorm Sandy visited the White House to ask President Obama to take a stronger stance against the fossil fuel industry, including a rejection of TransCanada's application for a permit to build the Keystone XL pipeline to carry crude oil from Alberta to refineries along the Gulf of Mexico coast.

The Washington Post's editorial board may have had the most ambitious request of all, proposing in an [editorial](#) over the weekend that Obama ask Congress to pass a carbon tax.

These expectations have changed dramatically compared with a year ago.

After ranking it with health care as top-tier priorities when he first arrived at the White House in 2009, Obama stopped mentioning climate change in 2010, focusing instead on substitutes like "green jobs" and "energy security." Then even those terms were mentioned less frequently as it became clear in the spring of 2010 that the Senate would not take up a comprehensive climate change bill.

The State of the Union addresses over the past two years reflected that shift; "climate change" went missing from the 2010 speech altogether and made only a cameo last year when the president acknowledged that divisions in Congress "may be too deep right now to pass a comprehensive plan to fight climate change."

But the issue came roaring back on Jan. 21, when the president vowed during his second inaugural address that the United States would "respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations."

Now Obama's allies in the environmental movement are hungering for more.

"After President Obama's inspiring call to tackle climate change as part of his inaugural address, millions of Americans look forward to the State of the Union address to describe this path," said Daniel Weiss, a senior fellow at the liberal think tank Center for American Progress. The speech should include a reference to U.S. EPA's plans to craft Clean Air Act rules for today's power fleet, he said.

Dan Becker of the Safe Climate Campaign said he had been assured by people within the administration that "it's in there" but didn't know what details the president would include tonight.

Senate panel to hold climate science briefing in SOTU's wake

Senate Environment and Public Works Chairwoman Barbara Boxer has scheduled a briefing for panel members tomorrow on the latest climate science research.

The briefing will follow President Obama's State of the Union address tonight, which is expected to take a more aggressive tone on climate change.

Boxer promised last month to hold the hearing, saying climate change had become an increasingly urgent issue in the aftermath of severe storms like last fall's Superstorm Sandy ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 22).

"We're seeing these storms come much more frequently," the California Democrat told reporters. "I'm in the position of looking at these droughts that are occurring, the bark beetle that is occurring. It's coming very quickly. Unless we act soon, we'll miss the window."

Schedule: The hearing is Wednesday at 10 a.m. in 406 Dirksen Senate Office Building.

Becker said he would be surprised if Obama provides too many details.

"He said the things we were looking for in the inaugural speech, and he may lay a little more flesh on the bones, but I don't know why he would invite the Republicans to start attacking before he needs to," he said.

Becker said he expected Obama to refer to items on his agenda like the New Source Performance Standards for new and existing power plants and to avoid topics like Keystone XL that wouldn't win him points with his supporters.

"We know what the menu is. I think he'll point to the menu," he said.

The State of the Union is supposed to be a call to Congress to act, and Becker said Obama might make a perfunctory gesture in Congress' direction.

"My guess is that I think he'll also say Congress needs to act," he said. "But I don't think he'll be holding his breath any more than I'm holding mine."

The president did call on Congress to act last year, specifically to pass a clean energy standard that would have required utilities to draw a set portion of their output from low- or no-carbon technologies like renewable energy and nuclear.

But Manik Roy of the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions said the president is unlikely to take the same tack this year.

"I'd be a little surprised to see him describe ambitious legislative proposals that really anyone would recognize don't have much likelihood of being enacted," Roy said.

Instead, Roy said Obama should use the prime-time spot to take his case for climate action to the American people, framing the issue as something that deserves attention before congressional Republicans have a chance to renew their assaults on EPA's Clean Air Act authorities.

"With the exception of the inaugural address, he surely won't have a bigger audience to discuss this issue with this year," Roy said.

EPA is set to finalize its new power plant carbon dioxide standard later this spring before proposing an even more controversial standard for existing plants later in the year.

"This is his chance to explain the context for those decisions," said Roy. "And I don't think those are going to be easy decisions for this administration, but they'll be important ones, and they'll be important ones for the public to understand."

Thomas Mann, a congressional expert at the Brookings Institution, said that climate change is only one of the once-banished issues Obama will bring back in full force this year.

He said he expected the president to also blame Congress for the looming sequestration, make a case for investment over deficit reduction and take other positions that the White House shied away from before the election.

"It's no doubt that the president's whole posture has changed," said Mann.

Obama's recent statements, including the inaugural address, showed that he had finally become convinced that he could not win over Republicans by offering to meet them halfway, Mann said.

"It makes sense to make a strong case for what he proposes to do," he added. "He sees the election as potentially having produced a different political dynamic, and he's going to try to push it as far as he possibly can."

Witnesses: Donald Wuebbles, professor of atmospheric science, University of Illinois; J. Marshall Shepherd, president of the American Meteorological Society and director of the program in atmospheric sciences at the University of Georgia; John Balbus, senior adviser for public health, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences; and James McCarthy, professor of biological oceanography, Harvard University.

-- *Jean Chemnick*



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