



## **Obama Will Personally Attend UN Climate Summit — Will It Be A Repeat Of Copenhagen?**

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President Barack Obama will soon head to the United Nations global warming summit in the hopes his presence will show how serious the U.S. is about a global climate treaty. Except, the last time Obama made a guns-blazing, enthusiastic personal appearance at climate talks — Copenhagen '09 — it was a stunning failure.

“There is not really a whole lot substantive to talk about in Paris,” Chip Knappenberger, a scientist and energy policy expert at the libertarian Cato Institute, told The Daily Caller News Foundation. “There will not be a binding agreement on countries’ emissions targets, and not a binding agreement on the green climate fund.”

“The writing is already on the wall — the climate agreement in Paris will be ineffective, at best,” Knappenberger said. “It’ll be interesting to see how this will be handled by the spinners.”

Despite renewed optimism over the upcoming climate talks, Copenhagen’s legacy of failure still looms large over the conference.

### **Obama Heads To Paris**

Obama wants a treaty to cut global carbon dioxide emissions to be a major part of his presidential legacy. White House staffers have been working tirelessly in the last year to get other countries to make pledges to reduce emissions, and Obama’s regulatory agencies have been churning out policies on power plants, oil and gas drilling, public lands and green energy to show just how serious the president takes global warming.

“Now, we’ve made a lot of progress to cut carbon pollution here at home, and we’re leading the world to take action as well,” Obama said in a Facebook post announcing his upcoming trip to Paris. “But we’ve got to do more. In a few weeks, I’m heading to Paris to meet with world leaders about a global agreement to meet this challenge.”

Obama even based his decision to kill the Keystone XL oil pipeline on his global warming legacy. The president argued approving the pipeline would “undercut” the perception America is

serious about tackling global warming — even though the pipeline would have no impact on the climate.

“America is now a global leader when it comes to taking serious action to fight climate change,” Obama said Friday. “And frankly, approving this project would have undercut that global leadership. And that’s the biggest risk we face — not acting.”

The perception of America’s willingness to fight global warming, however, may not be enough to get other major countries to sign an agreement to cut CO2 emissions.

The 2009 Copenhagen climate summit quickly broke down amid disagreements over which countries would cut emissions, and over how much money rich countries would give poor countries for development.

The summit was similarly hyped by the Obama administration. Observers were sure Obama’s personal appearance in Denmark would help galvanize support for a legally-binding climate treaty, but those dreams — like Obama’s attempt to get the 2016 Olympics in Chicago — were quickly laid to rest.

There was no agreement on a legally-binding treaty and support for the Kyoto Protocol — the world’s only binding climate treaty — broke down. Some observers blamed China for derailing the talks by refusing to cut emissions and urging developing countries to demand funding from rich countries. Even Obama was disappointed with the summit’s outcome.

“I think that people are justified in being disappointed about the outcome in Copenhagen,” Obama told PBS’s Jim Lehrer in 2009, “What I said was essentially that rather than see a complete collapse in Copenhagen in which nothing at all got done and would have been a huge backward step, at least we kind of held ground and there wasn’t too much backsliding from where we were.”

The failure of Copenhagen resulted in several countries eventually pulling out of the Kyoto Protocol. Countries, including Russia, Japan and Canada argued that their CO2 cuts would be rendered useless as long as China was not also forced to curb emissions.

“And then if the COP ends without a new treaty, the world leaders are not there to be embarrassed,” Ebell said, adding he thought countries would sign onto an agreement in Paris.

### **Will Paris Become Copenhagen?**

A key difference between Paris and Copenhagen will be that countries are going into upcoming climate talks already having laid out how they will cut emissions. This means one major source for conflict has been taken off the negotiating table.

Countries won’t have to live under a plan “imposed” upon them by the U.N. — a key reason China was so resistant to signing onto an international agreement. World leaders are also

expected to show up in Paris for the beginning of the talks and let diplomats handle the rest of the negotiating.

“As I understand, the plan now is for world leaders to fly in for the first day and hold a pep rally,” Myron Ebell, director of energy policy at the free market Competitive Enterprise Institute. “That way, they can’t impede the negotiations as they did in Copenhagen in 2009.”

U.N. delegates are desperate to get some sort of agreement out of Paris, as most want to get past the failure of Copenhagen in 2009 by accomplishing something this year. Even now, Copenhagen’s legacy is being re-spun in a more positive light.

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton defended the outcome of Copenhagen. The former Secretary of State said while there was no binding agreement on emissions, the U.S. got China to sign onto it.

“When we met in Copenhagen in 2009 and, literally, President Obama and I were hunting for the Chinese, going throughout this huge convention center, because we knew we had to get them to agree to something,” Clinton said during the debate. “Because there will be no effective efforts against climate change unless China and India join with the rest of the world.”

“They told us they’d left for the airport; we found out they were having a secret meeting,” Clinton added. “We marched up, we broke in, we said, ‘We’ve been looking all over for you. Let’s sit down and talk about what we need to do.’ And we did come up with the first international agreement that China has signed.”

The White House has also made sure to repeatedly broadcast that China, the world’s largest CO2 emitter, pledged to peak emissions by 2030 and ramp up its green energy use. But China has made no pledge to actually cut CO2 emissions from current levels, meaning the country’s growth could dwarf any cuts made by the U.S. and Europe.

India has also refused to cut emissions and plans on doubling or even tripling its CO2 emissions as the country develops and brings electricity to 300 million people who lack reliable power.

“The homework has already been handed in and graded, and the result isn’t pretty — if you are a proponent of limiting the world’s energy supply,” Knappenberger said of individual country’s plans to cut emissions.

So far, 126 countries have submitted their individual plans to cut CO2. But even all these commitments aren’t enough to reduce global emissions to the level U.S. officials say are necessary to avoid dangerous warming.

The U.N. recently admitted that current pledges by those 126 countries “have the capability of limiting the forecast temperature rise to around 2.7 degrees Celsius by 2100,” according to Politico. This is well over the U.N.’s pledge to keep projected warming under 2 degrees Celsius.

“The plans will do little to move the world’s carbon dioxide emissions off a business-as-usual scenario,” Knappenberger said. “Consequently, the 2C target is a complete miss.”

### **Can A UN Treaty Get Past Republicans?**

Republican lawmakers have vowed to stop any U.N. climate treaty the president brings before them for approval, spurring speculation that Obama won’t bring a treaty before Congress.

“The theory is that, so long as the emission-reduction targets are only politically binding, the president would be under no obligation to submit them to the Senate,” Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee said in a speech at the conservative Heritage Foundation.

The White House is expected to bypass Congress if any U.N. climate treaty is signed by arguing whatever comes out of Paris isn’t a treaty, but an international commitment made by Obama using existing U.S. laws and regulations.

But doesn’t that mean a future administration could unilaterally pull out of the Paris agreement? A Republican administration could pull out of the agreement by undoing Obama’s regulatory agenda, but that could be complicated in the courts.

“The next administration, the Congress, and the courts” could argue “you can’t repeal the Environmental Protection Agency regulations or overturn them in court, we made an international commitment,” Ebell said.

Republicans have sworn to block a climate treaty. Lee called for both chambers of Congress to pass a joint resolution demanding Obama submit a Paris agreement to the Senate for its “advice and consent.” Lawmakers also suggested using its power over funding to punish the administration should it unilaterally push a U.N. treaty.

“The hybrid-agreement theory is clever, to be sure,” Lee said. “But it flatly contradicts the understanding of the Framework Convention that has been universally accepted since its ratification in 1992.”

“Targets and timetables of any legal character have always been understood to require the Senate’s advice and consent,” Lee said.