



## **Obama faces hard sell on climate fund**

By Timothy Cama

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President Obama is facing international pressure to contribute to a \$100 billion-a-year fund to help poor countries deal with climate change, but Republicans are likely to stand in the way, endangering his efforts on a key legacy issue.

The program, known as the Green Climate Fund, was established as a key piece of the global climate agreement the United Nations hopes to finalize next year.

Five countries' leaders announced Sept. 23 that they would contribute to the fund, including a \$1 billion pledge from France, bringing its total to \$2.3 billion.

But Obama made no such pledges.

Both supporters and opponents of the fund agree that any significant U.S. contribution is unlikely given that the fund combines two of Republicans' least favorite government programs: foreign aid and fighting climate change.

Obama has not yet asked lawmakers for money, but observers said it'd be difficult for him to contribute to the fund without Congress' approval.

Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) made it clear that a request for the climate fund would encounter strong resistance.

"Any proposal by the president to waste Americans' hard-earned tax dollars will be dead on arrival in the Senate," he said in a statement.

"Our foreign aid dollars need to go to the most pressing issues in the developing world: fostering economic growth," said Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) in a statement.

“President Obama has already committed more than \$1 billion taxpayer dollars to the international community for his global warming initiative, but his restrictive policies have actually prevented our aid dollars from supporting critical projects like natural gas power plants,” he added.

Inhofe referred to a report from the Congressional Research Service for the figure on international climate change assistance.

If the United States doesn’t contribute, it could put the program at risk and keep climate negotiators from securing an historic accord.

Developing countries have demanded money to help them adapt to the expected changes a warmer earth would bring, like floods, droughts and strong storms. Without the cash, they are not likely to sign on to a U.N. global agreement to reduce emissions.

Pat Michaels, who leads the conservative Cato Institute’s climate research, argues that the globe really isn’t warming, citing data from a University of East Anglia study which said temperatures haven’t risen in at least 15 years.

“As long as people don’t see a warming trend, it would be politically really dangerous to do this,” Michaels said.

He also cited cost concerns, noting that the UN is asking developed countries to commit \$15 billion to the fund this year, but will ask for \$100 billion a year by 2020.

Michaels predicted that the United States would have to shoulder most of the burden for the fund.

“That’s not going to set real well with a country that is running ... massive deficits,” he said.

Nick Loris, an energy economist at the Heritage Foundation, said the funds are not likely to be beneficial to poorer countries.

“When these funds are given, in a lot of cases, only a fraction of the funds are well spent,” he said. “Not to mention, the aid, in a lot of situations, can encourage the perpetuation of the very reasons and regimes that give rise to the need for assistance in the first place.”

Loris said Obama has shown a history of bypassing Congress in similar cases, citing a recent report that the president hoped to negotiate a global climate agreement that would not require the Senate’s approval.

“It certainly wouldn’t surprise me to see the administration use any means possible to do what they want to do in terms of fight climate change,” he said.

But advocates for the fund are optimistic.

“It’s very likely that the U.S. will put forward a pledge,” said Heather Coleman, who manages climate policy for Oxfam America. “What’s really in question at this point is how much.”

Oxfam has asked Obama to commit to \$3 billion over the next three years for the climate fund. Coleman said that is reasonable and likely to happen.

Coleman also believes Obama can do it without Congress, by shifting other foreign aid around.

“The administration can certainly put forward a pledge and seek to meet that pledge through looking at the current U.S. budget and allocating funding,” she said.

Karen Orenstein, Friends of the Earth’s international policy analyst, said the U.S. has both a moral and legal obligation to contribute, due to its membership in the U.N. climate change framework.

“We have a lot of responsibility for causing the climate crisis, and we also are the world’s largest economy,” she said.

Orenstein expects some Republicans to sign onto a U.S. contribution, especially if they see climate change as a humanitarian issue.

“There are quite a few Republicans who care about humanitarian crises,” she said. “You’re going to get some Republicans who care about that stuff.”