

The Washington Times

Chu to court China on CO2 reduction, technology

By: Amanda DeBard

Two top Obama administration officials will spend three days next week courting China to commit to pollution reduction schemes that the Asian powerhouse adamantly opposes.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, who are both Chinese Americans, will be the latest in a series of U.S. officials to try to pressure the world's largest polluter to cut its carbon output and ramp up its use of "clean" energy.

Chinese officials say the country's top priority is to eradicate poverty, which they say cannot be done without sending carbon dioxide into the air. But the U.S. shows no sign of easing the pressure.

"There will be every attempt by the United States to get China to agree to some type of emissions reduction timetable," said Patrick Michaels, an environmental expert at the the libertarian Cato Institute.

The gateway to a cleaner Chinese economy will likely be money from the U.S. and other developed nations. The U.S. government has not said how much its willing to pay, but China wants 1 percent of the U.S.'s gross domestic product a year to assist with their technological development, Mr. Michaels said.

"We are not going to agree to that," he added.

U.S. Climate Envoy Todd Stern said that an international agreement to pollute less would have to include money for poor countries.

Mr. Chu and Mr. Locke might make some progress on reducing emissions if they press China to revisit the idea of a carbon tax. Chinese Finance Ministry official Su Ming said in May that the Chinese government "is considering imposing a pro rata carbon tax on coal and fossil fuels."

"We're not going to get very far if we insist that China take a binding emissions target, so the U.S. should glom onto this idea of China offering to impose a price floor on carbon," said Adele Morris, deputy director for climate and energy economics at the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution.

Mr. Chu said in a statement that the point of the trip is to point out the mutually beneficial relationship in the clean energy sector.

"It's in our interest and China's to explore ways to cooperate for our mutual benefit -- by promoting renewable energy, encouraging energy efficiency and cutting pollution," Mr. Chu said.

There is a lot of pressure on China to clean up its operations because experts and scientists agree that it will not be possible to slow the gradual warming of the planet if China is not on board. China, in response, says developed nations are responsible for the bulk of the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and therefore it is their responsibility to act.

While China has taken small steps to clean up its economy, such as using wind and solar energy and driving low-emitting cars, the country builds one new coal-fired power plant a week, on average.

The U.S. is relying on technology to trap carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants, when it becomes available, to allow coal to compete in a “green” economy. Mr. Chu is expected to highlight the benefits of carbon capture technology during his emission-reduction pitch to Chinese officials.

“I think the Department of Energy is trying to foster technology cooperation with China,” Mrs. Morris said. “It’s not an issue of where we’re giving them technology, but we can help develop these technologies together and I think there’s a precedent for that.”