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Obama lists challenges & opportunities in UN climate speech

By Jon H. Harsch

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In his first address to the United Nations, President Barack Obama told world leaders in New York Tuesday for the U.N.'s Climate Change Summit that "the threat from climate change is serious, it is urgent, and it is growing." He warned that if the world fails to act "boldly, swiftly, and together, we risk consigning future generations to an irreversible catastrophe."

With Congress fixated on health care reform legislation and climate change legislation possibly postponed until next year, Obama acknowledged in his U.N. speech that "the hardest part of our journey is in front of us." He said it will be tough to achieve "sweeping but necessary change in the midst of a global recession, where every nation's most immediate priority is reviving their economy and putting their people back to work." Perhaps thinking specifically of legislation stalled in Congress, he added that "all of us will face doubts and difficulties in our own capitals as we try to reach a lasting solution to the climate challenge."

In contrast to dramatic Chinese and Japanese climate change initiatives announced at the summit, Obama pointed instead to recent U.S. accomplishments rather than specific commitments for future action. He said that:

- "... the United States has done more to promote clean energy and reduce carbon pollution in the last eight months than at any other time in our history."
- "We are making our government's largest ever investment in renewable energy – an investment aimed at doubling the generating capacity from wind and other renewable resources in three years."
- "... entrepreneurs are constructing wind turbines and solar panels and batteries for hybrid cars with the help of loan guarantees and tax credits – projects that are creating new jobs and new industries."
- "We've proposed the very first national policy aimed at both increasing fuel economy and reducing greenhouse gas pollution for all new cars and trucks."
- "We're moving forward with our nation's first offshore wind energy projects."
- "We're investing billions to capture carbon pollution so that we can clean up our coal plants."

- “. . . for the first time ever, we’ll begin tracking how much greenhouse gas pollution is being emitted throughout the country.”
- “I will work with my colleagues at the G20 to phase out fossil fuel subsidies so that we can better address our climate challenge.”
- “. . . the House of Representatives passed an energy and climate bill in June that would finally make clean energy the profitable kind of energy for American businesses and dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Obama concluded that “after too many years of inaction and denial, there’s finally widespread recognition of the urgency of the challenge before us. We know what needs to be done. We know that our planet’s future depends on a global commitment to permanently reduce greenhouse gas pollution. We know that if we put the right rules and incentives in place, we will unleash the creative power of our best scientists and engineers and entrepreneurs to build a better world.”

Obama did not mention one major unknown – whether he will be able to achieve one of his top goals: having Congress pass climate change legislation before major international climate change negotiations begin in Copenhagen in December.

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