



Courtesy of U.S. Senate

The countdown to President Obama's January, 21 2013 inauguration begins: there are only ten days left for the President's speechwriters to put the finishing touches on the President's second, and final, inaugural address. The inaugural address is the first of two important opportunities President Obama will have in the coming months to describe the course of his second term to the American public (the other being the State of Union, expected sometime in February). What, if anything, can we expect to hear about energy and environmental policy in Obama's 2013 inaugural address?

If history gives us any indication, we likely will hear little about environmental issues on January 21st. Obama's [2009 inaugural address](#) was about 2,400 words. Within that total, Obama devoted only 50 words (or 2 percent of the speech) to direct discussion of environmental issues.

We will build . . . the electric grids . . . that feed our commerce and bind us together. We'll restore science to its rightful place . . . We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories.

Obama's first inaugural address also included broader statements that one could say speak indirectly to Obama's environmental agenda, such as a general phrase celebrating "risk-takers" and innovators, an assertion that "we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age . . .," dialogue about the appropriate size of government ("The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works . . ."), and an affirmation that the Obama Administration will not shy away from "big plans."

Unsurprisingly, the bulk of Obama's 2009 address focused on economic recovery. And although winter is not an unfitting metaphor for the chilling economic times (or January temperatures in Washington, for that matter), the President relied heavily on cold weather analogies that pair strangely with global warming— "in the depth of winter," "icy currents," "endure what storms may come," "coldest of months," "winter of our hardship," etc. Given that [2012 was the hottest year on record](#), we can only hope that Obama will ditch the winter analogies this time around.

Despite the lack of attention to environmental issues in his first inaugural address, however, Obama did not neglect the environment during his first term. Although [some](#)

[environmentalists](#), including [Al Gore](#), have expressed frustration about the pace of environmental progress over the past four years, particularly Obama's lack of action to address climate change, the independent fact-checker [PolitiFact](#) reports that the President has kept or is continuing to work on [45 of his 58 environmental campaign promises](#). Kept promises include increased funding for environmental programs, water quality improvements, and alternative energy investments; broken promises include creating a cap-and-trade plan and regulating pollution from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).

Turning to the President's [2012 State of the Union](#) speech, we can see far greater attention paid to energy and environmental issues. Out of an approximately 15-page speech, about 1.75 pages (or almost 12 percent of the speech) focus broadly on energy and the environment. Multiple paragraphs are devoted to "American-made energy" and Obama's infamous "all-of-the-above strategy that develops every available source of American energy." The President highlighted the story of a laid-off furniture manufacturer who found new employment at a wind turbine company. Obama also directly addressed clean energy incentives and regulation of pollution, although he stated pessimistically that "[t]he differences in this chamber may be too deep right now to pass a comprehensive plan to fight climate change."

Perhaps this time around, in the "Post-Superstorm Sandy" America, where concern about the impacts of climate change was sufficient to garner New York City [Mayor Michael Bloomberg's presidential campaign endorsement](#), Obama will expand discussion of energy and environmental topics in his inaugural address. Obama might take his lead from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who delivered his [third State of the State address](#) last night in Albany. In his address, Governor Cuomo proposed a host of mitigation and adaptation actions New York State will pursue to address climate change in the coming year, including:

- Establishing New York as the national leader in the clean tech economy;
- Investing in an electric car network;
- Appointing an "Energy Czar;"
- Increasing funding for solar panel installations;
- Lowering the regional greenhouse gas emission cap to reduce current emissions levels;
- Increasing distributed generation of electricity from renewable sources;
- Building green economy training programs;
- Renovating buildings for climate resilience;
- Reengineering New York Harbor;
- Flood-proofing NYC's subway system;

- Strengthening wastewater infrastructure to withstand storm surges;
- Improving oversight of utilities; and
- Upgrading disaster preparedness plans.

The President could also draw upon recommendations from the coalition of almost seventy environmental organizations (including NRDC, Earthjustice, EDF, Greenpeace, Oceana, and Sierra Club) that released [a letter to the President](#) on Monday highlighting specific actions the Obama Administration can take in its second term to address the threat of climate change. The letter urges the President to continue to elevate public discourse about climate change, set standards to cut carbon emissions from power plants, reject the Keystone XL pipeline, and invest in sustainable infrastructure.

Given that the theme of the 57th Presidential Inauguration is "[Faith in America's Future](#)," we can hope that the President will recognize publicly the swift federal action needed to preserve our environment and protect future generations from the worst potential impacts of our changing climate. Tune in next Monday to find out.