2013 SOTU Climate Change Bingo Card

Environmental policy wonks around the country: it's time to order your vegan hot wings, purchase some organic beers, and don the uniform of your favorite political party (red or blue tie, of course)! Tonight is the (second) biggest television event of February: President Obama's 2013 State of the Union. Obama is set to score major points with his environmentalist fans by picking up where he left off in his discussion energy and environmental issues during his inaugural address. Can we expect a touchdown on climate change tonight?

In a post preceding President Obama's inaugural address, I discussed how, in the 2012 State of the Union, the President devoted about 12 percent of his speech to clean and domestic energy. In past years, environmentalists may have considered this level of attention acceptable; but the President's surprising focus on climate change in his recent inaugural address energized the environmental community and set high expectations for tonight. Among his words on the topic during the inaugural address (159 out of 2095 words—or 7.5 percent of the speech, to be precise), Obama delivered the following inspirational promise,

> **"We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations."**

The President's broad statements on tackling climate change appeared to be setting the stage for additional policy details to be unveiled in his State of the Union. The Guardian reports that many environmental groups expect the President to mention one or two specific actions his administration will take to address climate change. According to Politico, White House aides have told green groups, "You're going to like what you hear" tonight. What might Obama choose to highlight in his brief 50 minutes on the podium? Below is a quick round-up of potential topics. And, as you're watching the speech tonight and like free bingo games to play, be sure to use my *2013 State of the Union Climate Change Bingo Card*.

Federal Climate Legislation. In his 2011 State of the Union, Obama appealed to Congress to "pass[] a comprehensive energy and climate bill with incentives that

will finally make clean energy the profitable kind of energy in America." Tonight, might Obama renew his call for Congress to take up a comprehensive climate bill? Will Obama at least mention federal legislation regarding cap-and-trade, a carbon tax, or a federal clean energy standard? Politico thinks not: "Cap and trade died in the Senate in 2010, the president's proposal for a clean-energy mandate has sputtered, [and] Republicans have beaten back his repeated calls for eliminating oil company tax breaks . . . ." But a recent editorial in the Washington Post urges the President to engage Congress on the issue tonight. In particular, the Editorial Board recommends that "Putting a slowly rising, significant price on carbon emissions would encourage people to burn less fossil fuel without micromanaging by Congress or the Energy Department."

EPA Regulations on Power Plants. National Geographic News reports "a growing belief among White House advisors" that Obama will announce tonight that he is directing the Environmental Protection Agency to enact new emissions regulations for existing coal-fired power plants. (Politico agrees this course of action is likely to be announced tonight, as do the Washington Post and The Hill.) The Washington Post further suggests that Obama might try to leverage the impending EPA regulations as a "stick" to encourage Congress to work with him to develop a comprehensive climate policy.

Bipartisan Bargaining. Analysts at the Brookings Institute suggest that tonight offers an opportunity for President Obama to appeal to both sides of the aisle with a "grand bargain," perhaps by announcing he will open up new lands for drilling or streamline drilling regulations, while also proposing a tax on carbon. (Recall last year's State of the Union, in which Obama discussed opening "millions of new acres for oil and gas exploration.")

International Commitments. Obama could announce his intention to put the United States on track to meeting the commitment he made to world leaders in December 2009 at the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit: reducing U.S. emissions to 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020, 42 percent below 2005 levels by 2030, and 83 percent below 2005 levels by 2050. At the time, the U.S. House of Representatives had just passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act, and comprehensive federal climate policy seemed almost inevitable. Today, any mention of renewing international commitments seems unlikely.

Keystone XL Pipeline. The State Department delayed the controversial Keystone XL pipeline project in late 2011, citing the need for additional environmental

review. The issue of whether to approve the pipeline is expected to resurface this year. Regarding mention of Keystone XL in the State of the Union, Bill McKibben, Co-Founder of 350.org, stated, "I think the environmental movement is waiting to hear what, if anything, he says about Keystone XL." In an opinion piece today, New York Times columnist David Brooks called upon the President to approve the pipeline as part of his second term agenda. On one hand, if the President publically supports the pipeline tonight, it might pair strangely with other efforts to address climate change that he might discuss. On the other hand, announcing support for the pipeline could serve as a concession to Republicans, complementing the President's announcement of more aggressive climate change action.

Hydraulic Fracturing. The Huffington Post states it is "probably an unrealistic expectation at this point" to think that Obama will announce a federal moratorium on hydraulic fracturing, but many environmental groups nonetheless would like to hear the President announce such a policy. At the very least, it will be interesting to see whether the President makes any mention of domestic natural gas production at all, perhaps opting to avoid the topic entirely.

Alternative Energy, Green Jobs. In past speeches, Obama has favored discussion of "green jobs," and he may well turn his attention to the topic again tonight. USA Today suspects Obama will discuss the role of clean energy jobs in addressing climate change. Similarly, The Hill suggests that Obama could announce an expansion of Defense Department green energy programs and increased alternative energy development on public lands. In general, The Hill agrees that "Obama is likely to again cast climate change in an economic light — especially as Republicans are accusing him of retreating from problems in the economy." Maybe Obama will even take this opportunity to address subsidies for fossil fuel companies? In contrast, the National Journal thinks that "Obama doesn't have to sugarcoat things this time around;" instead, we should "expect him to talk a lot less about the glories of green jobs in the second term, and a lot more about the long-term struggle ahead to overcome the challenge of climate change."

Extreme Weather, Climate Adaptation. President Obama may take his lead from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who laid out sea-level rise and climate adaptation goals in his 2013 State of the State address. In particular, The Hill suggests Obama could discuss improving coastline resiliency or bolstering federal energy efficiency programs. Even if the President does not get into adaptation specifics, Eliot Diringer, Vice President of the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, opines that the President should use the State of the Union as an

opportunity to connect climate change to the lives of everyday Americans by mentioning extreme weather events. Frank Maisano, an energy strategist at the law firm Bracewell & Giuliani, agrees that Obama is likely to mention the recent “wild weather.” For instance, the President might highlight Super Storm Sandy, Nor’easter Nemo, the fact that 2012 was the hottest year on record, or the Midwestern droughts.