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PRESIDENTIAL CLIMATE ACTION PROJECT

# Climate Action Without Congress: How Obama Can Take Charge

*Climate policy leaders say President has the authority, responsibility to demonstrate America's leadership for upcoming international climate talks*

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In the wake of Congress's failure to act on global climate change, President Obama should launch an aggressive partnership between federal, tribal, state and local government leaders to advance U.S. leadership on the issue.

That's one of the key recommendations in "[Plan B: Near-Term Presidential Actions For Energy & Environmental Leadership](#)," a five-point plan released today by the Presidential Climate Action Project (PCAP) and delivered to key administration officials Wednesday. The plan outlines how President Obama can demonstrate America's commitment to climate action before the international community gathers in November to work on a global climate treaty.

"Congress's inability to cap U.S. carbon emissions contributed to the failure to reach a global climate treaty last year in Copenhagen," said PCAP Executive Director William Becker. "It now appears that Congress has failed again just months before international negotiators are set to reconvene.

"Congress has passed the ball back to President Obama," Becker said. "He should run with it."

Key parts of the plan are built on authority that states, cities and other entities already have to cut America's greenhouse gas emissions far below the goal Obama has embraced so far. It recommends that the Administration create a President's Council for a Clean Energy Economy, in which leading state, local and tribal government leaders, nongovernmental organizations, and Administration officials develop a detailed roadmap to a low-carbon future.

"At the top of our list is a full partnership between all levels of government in the United States to build the clean energy economy," said Terry Tamminen, former secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency and special advisor to California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. "The Senate has debated whether to preempt some of the states' power to deal with climate change. Instead, the federal government should help states *expand* the leadership they have shown for more than a decade."

Tom Peterson, president of the Center for Climate Strategies, said a recent macro-economic analysis by his organization showed that if all 50 states adopted a portfolio of 23 selected energy and climate policies, they would cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions 27 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. Those reductions – far deeper than levels proposed by President Obama or Congress – would create 2.5 million new jobs and add \$134 billion to the nation’s GDP, Peterson said.

PCAP also recommends that President Obama declare a “war on waste” to make America the most energy-efficient industrial economy in the world by 2035. During his presidential campaign, Obama cited a United Nations report ranking America 22nd in energy efficiency among the world's biggest economies.

The other recommendations in PCAP's five-point plan urge the President to:

- 1) Champion a new national transportation policy that emphasizes low-carbon mobility choices, and start work on a national low-carbon standard for transportation fuels.
- 2) Eliminate fossil-energy subsidies under the Administration’s control, including unnecessary research subsidies for fossil-energy industries and cut-rate leases and royalty fees for oil and gas companies.
- 3) Include the restoration of local ecosystems in the Administration’s emerging climate adaptation strategy, re-establishing their ability to protect communities from flooding, heat waves, drought and other predicted impacts of climate change.

“We believe U.S. leadership remains one of the most important catalysts for an international climate treaty,” said former U.S. Sen. Gary Hart, chair of PCAP’s National Advisory Committee. “It’s time for an historic intergovernmental partnership to achieve significant near-term reductions in America’s climate-altering emissions.”

International negotiations on a global climate treaty will convene in Cancún, Mexico, in November. Nations involved in the climate talks are meeting this week in Bonn to prepare for the Cancún conference.

“Past Congresses have given presidents and their administrations substantial authority to act on energy and climate policy,” said David Orr, professor of environmental studies at Oberlin College. “Capping and pricing carbon remains the cornerstone of serious U.S. action on climate change, but there is much the Obama Administration can do without Congress to move America down the path to a clean-energy economy.”

Copies of PCAP's latest plan are available online at: [www.climateactionproject.com](http://www.climateactionproject.com). A recording of today's media briefing will also be available online shortly after its conclusion.

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*Founded in January 2007, the Presidential Climate Action Project is a foundation-funded program to identify changes in federal policies and programs, especially at the executive level, that can mitigate climate change and facilitate America's transition to a clean energy economy. The program is administered by Natural Capitalism Solutions in Boulder, Colo.*