

# Barack Obama promises US action on climate

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- President Barack Obama yesterday vowed to put the fight against global warming at the heart of his next four-year term in office.

Sweeping aside [years of American prevarication](#) on whether to act on emissions, Obama promised the US would lead the world in its efforts to curb global warming, and in the development of the technologies to achieve this goal.

"We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations," he said on Monday in his [inaugural address](#) to the nation.

## Overwhelming judgement

With the horrors of [superstorm Sandy](#) and the recent US droughts fresh reminders that [extreme weather events are becoming more severe and frequent](#) – a trend predicted by climate models – Obama sniped at Americans who still deny that human activity is to blame.

"Some may still deny the overwhelming judgement of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires and crippling drought, and more powerful storms," he said.

Obama flagged a transition to cleaner energy as an economic opportunity, one that would be lost to other nations unless the US stepped up. "The path towards sustainable energy sources will be long and sometimes difficult, but Americans cannot resist this transition, we must lead it.

"We cannot cede to other nations the technology that will power new jobs and new industries," said the president. "We must claim its promise. That's how we will maintain our economic vitality and our national treasure, our forests and waterways, our crop lands and snow-capped peaks."

## Clarion call

Environmental groups responded enthusiastically. "President Obama's clarion call to action on the threat of climate change leaves no doubt this will be a priority in his second term," Alden Meyer of the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#) told *New Scientist*.

"The politics are shifting rapidly on climate change and clean energy issues, in the wake of the recent drought, wildfires, hurricane Sandy and other extreme weather events," said Meyer. "With presidential leadership, that shift will continue and deepen over the next four years, and meaningful progress on climate change will become an important part of Obama's legacy as president."

"This is a call to action against the climate chaos that is sweeping our nation and threatening our future," said Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in Washington DC. "Now it's time to act. Power plants are our single largest source of carbon

pollution and we must cut that pollution. We must do it now, for the sake of our country, our children and the future we share."

## **Spectre at the feast**

Although the president and his Republican opponent, Mitt Romney, avoided discussing climate change in their televised debates prior to the election, Obama hinted of action to come in his post-election news conference, promising a "wide-ranging conversation" on climate change.

His new commitment also adds flesh to [promises made four years ago](#) in his first inaugural address to "roll back the spectre of a warming planet".

This time, he also has [tactics in hand](#) to outmanoeuvre the entrenched Republican opposition that foiled his attempts in 2010 to give the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) power to regulate emissions of greenhouse gases.

[According to The New York Times](#), new legislation is currently being drafted to enable the EPA to clamp down on dirtier, coal-fired power plants. Environmentalists are confident this can be achieved. The NRDC last year proposed a plan that would reduce carbon pollution from coal-burning power plants by a quarter, which would cut the total US carbon footprint by 10 per cent.

There are also increasing signs that as the Obama joins the battle against climate change, he has the American people on his side. [A pre-election poll](#) showed that most Americans now accept that global warming is caused by human activity.

But environmentalists warned of battles to come. "It will now take a sustained campaign by the president, his cabinet officials and the rest of his team to mobilise the American people in support of this effort, and to overcome the opposition of entrenched interests to the rapid transition away from fossil fuels that's needed to stabilise the climate," says Meyer.



Can we, this time? (Image: Kyodo/AP/PA)