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Hard Task for New Team on Energy and Climate

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WASHINGTON — The team President-elect [Barack Obama](#) introduced on Monday to carry out his energy and environmental policies faces a host of political, economic, diplomatic and scientific challenges that could impede his plans to address [global warming](#) and America's growing dependence on dirty and uncertain sources of energy.

Acknowledging that a succession of presidents and Congresses had failed to make much progress on the issues, Mr. Obama vowed to press ahead despite the faltering economy and suggested that he would invest his political capital in trying to break logjams.

"This time must be different," Mr. Obama said at a news conference in Chicago. "This will be a leading priority of my presidency and a defining test of our time. We cannot accept complacency, nor accept any more broken promises."

Shortly after Mr. Obama spoke, transition officials confirmed that he would select Senator [Ken Salazar](#), a first-term Democrat from Colorado, as interior secretary. Mr. Salazar's appointment will complete the team of environmental and energy officials in the new administration.

The most pressing environmental issue for the incoming team will almost certainly be settling on an effective and politically tenable approach to the intertwined issues of energy security and global warming.

The point person for these issues will be [Carol M. Browner](#), who was named on Monday to the new position of White House coordinator for energy and climate. Ms. Browner, the administrator of the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) under President [Bill Clinton](#), will oversee two former aides, Lisa P. Jackson, who was selected as the new agency administrator, and [Nancy Sutley](#), who will be the chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. Joining the group will be [Steven Chu](#), a Nobel laureate in physics whom Mr. Obama designated to lead the Energy Department.

Mr. Salazar, a former director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources and state attorney general, is a farmer and rancher whose family has lived in Colorado for five generations. He is known as a staunch conservationist and an opponent of developing oil shale on public lands.

His appointment will leave a Democratic vacancy in the Senate. Colorado, which voted for Mr. Obama 53 percent to 45 percent, has a Democratic governor, Bill Ritter, who will name a replacement to complete the final two years of Mr. Salazar's term. Mr. Salazar's brother John, a congressman, is among potential appointees to fill the Senate seat.

The intense ideological and regional rivalries that have stalled climate change legislation in Congress for years have not suddenly melted away. And even though Mr. Obama promises to give energy legislation a high priority, he first must stabilize an economy that is shedding jobs by the hundreds of thousands each month.

The new team faces political urgency to deliver on promises made by Mr. Obama on the campaign trail. One was his pledge to use a cap-and-trade bill for curbing heat-trapping gases as both the means of shifting investments away from energy sources that cause emissions of such gases and also as the source of the \$15 billion a year he promised to invest in advanced energy technology. That figure may be dwarfed by spending on stimulus programs, including so-called green projects like building wind farms and making buildings more energy efficient.

Previous efforts to move a comprehensive climate bill through Congress stalled even without the deepening recession the nation confronts today, said Rafe Pomerance, a negotiator in the Clinton administration on international climate agreements

and the president of Clean Air-Cool Planet, a Washington nonprofit group.

Mr. Pomerance said the challenge would be to devise a scientifically rigorous bill that would satisfy lawmakers who fear the costs.

Left unclear on Monday was how the new president's advisers intend to use the levers of government to get to the "new energy economy" Mr. Obama described. Also uncertain was what relationship they would forge with his powerful economic advisers.

"In policy terms, I think there are big questions about what priority will be given to direct public infrastructure spending versus tax-based incentives versus environmental markets versus direct regulation," said Paul Bledsoe of the National Commission on Energy Policy, a bipartisan advisory group. "There is still a very profound debate on all of that."

The diplomatic tension is driven by the steps required to work toward a new global climate treaty, which the United States and nearly all other nations have committed to completing by December 2009. The last round of talks ended last weekend in Poland with few signs of progress on the main goal, limiting emissions of heat-trapping gases without hampering economic development.

It is widely felt that if the United States does not demonstrate concrete domestic steps to curb its emissions from burning fossil fuels, fast-growing developing countries will continue to balk at taking on obligations to cut their emissions. And while Mr. Obama will enjoy a larger Democratic majority than Mr. Clinton did in his two terms, the Senate has long made such steps a prerequisite for its required consent to any climate treaty.

The scientific urgency comes from the unanticipated recent growth in emissions of carbon dioxide in China, India and other countries with fast-expanding economies. This heat-trapping gas is the biggest concern because its long life, once the gas is released, causes it to build in the atmosphere, something like unpaid credit-card debt, as long as reductions are not made.

Additional pressure comes from growing recognition that market forces alone are unlikely to drive the spread of nonpolluting energy technologies fast enough to matter where all the growth in energy use is at its peak, in the rapidly growing countries of Asia and Latin America.

Nathan Lewis, who leads a team at Caltech pursuing ways to greatly improve [solar energy](#) technologies, said the appointment of Dr. Chu as energy secretary sent a strong signal that Mr. Obama understood that any program on climate-friendly energy had to have three prongs: increasing efficiency, moving existing nonpolluting energy technologies more quickly into the market, and advancing on the frontiers of energy science in search of radical breakthroughs.

"Energy efficiency cannot be seen as Job 1 and the other stuff Job 2," Dr. Lewis said. "You've got to do them all as Job 1 because they all have to work."

Dr. Chu has spoken of using coal to generate electricity as an environmental "nightmare," but he acknowledges that the nation lacks the technology to replace it or clean it up in the near term. Tom Kuhn, president of the Edison Electric Institute, a trade group for utilities, said that any solution to the climate problem must address these costs and provide consumers and electricity producers time to adjust.

"There will be major costs," Mr. Kuhn said. "It's a question of trying to mitigate the costs as much as possible."

John M. Broder reported from Washington, and Andrew C. Revkin from New York.