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## U.S. to Set Emissions Target Before Climate Talks

By [JOHN M. BRODER](#)

WASHINGTON — The United States will propose a near-term target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions before the [United Nations climate change](#) meeting in Copenhagen next month, a senior administration official said Monday. [President Obama](#), the official said, will announce the specific target “in coming days.”

The announcement of a target will take the current legislative stalemate over a climate bill into account, the senior official said, and thus might present a range of possible reductions rather than a single figure.

The lack of consensus in Congress puts Mr. Obama in a tricky domestic and diplomatic bind. He cannot promise more than Congress may eventually deliver when it takes up climate change legislation next year. But if he does not offer some concrete pledge, the United States will bear the brunt of the blame for the lack of an international agreement.

The official also said the president would decide shortly whether and for how long he might attend the December climate meeting, which runs from Dec. 7 to Dec. 18. He repeated the president’s assertion that he would consider attending if his presence could be a useful impetus to a deal.

The official, a member of the team of American climate change treaty negotiators, spoke at a White House briefing under the condition that he not be identified.

The Obama administration has so far resisted demands that it commit to a specific emissions reduction goal, saying that it could not pre-empt Congress, which has stalled on climate change legislation. China, the world’s largest emitter of climate-altering gases, has also refused to spell out its plans for reducing emissions, although President [Hu Jintao](#) promised in September that his country would reduce the amount of emissions per unit of economic output by a “notable margin.”

Many observers of the climate negotiations expect China to deliver a more specific pledge on this so-called carbon intensity target before the Copenhagen meeting opens.

Mr. Obama has come under criticism from leaders of dozens of countries that have already set domestic greenhouse gas reduction targets. He is also under fire from numerous environmental advocates who say the United States, the world’s second-largest emitter, must take a credible commitment to Copenhagen to ensure that the talks do not fall apart.

The House passed a measure in June that calls for a 17 percent reduction over 2005 levels of the domestic emissions of the gases that contribute to the heating of the planet. A Senate committee passed a bill last month that sets a 20 percent target, but that is likely to be weakened in future negotiations.

Paul Bledsoe of the bipartisan National Commission on Energy Policy said the president's hands were tied by Congressional inaction. "The U.S. cannot negotiate at Copenhagen above the targets in domestic legislation without risking support for that legislation in the Senate," Mr. Bledsoe said. "If European demands continue above the U.S. domestic targets, they set up an impossible dynamic for the administration."

A second administration official briefing reporters on Monday said that Mr. Obama would have a stronger hand at Copenhagen if Congress had already acted on climate change legislation, but that the debate on health care had blocked it.

"We would have preferred that health care be done a long time ago, and we'd be having an energy debate today," the official said.

Senator [John Kerry](#), Democrat of Massachusetts, said Mr. Obama could credibly tell delegates to the climate conference that the United States intended to reduce its emissions by 17 percent to 20 percent, based on the legislation that has been approved by the House and the Senate environment committee.

"It's important for the president to exert that leadership with consultation with Congress," Mr. Kerry said in an interview late last week.

Mr. Obama and leaders of a number of other major countries have said that the Copenhagen talks would not yield a comprehensive and binding treaty to address global warming. Instead, the more than 190 nations represented there are expected to produce an interim agreement that addresses the major issues without requiring ratification or international enforcement.

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