

Obama Moves Beyond Climate Spin

By Wayne Visser

"It's a little bit funny, this feeling inside" ... We are so used to being disappointed by politicians that the world seems a little out of joint when they actually meet or exceed our expectations.

Yesterday, in what he described as "first steps", Obama directed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to reconsider the Bush administration's denial of a 2007 request by California and 13 other states to implement strict new limits on tailpipe emissions that contribute to global warming. He also directed the Department of Transportation to follow through on Congressional legislation to raise existing fuel economy standards on new cars and lorries by 40 percent beginning in 2011.

Admittedly, it is still very much the honeymoon period for Obama, and every president has their 100-day plan to impress. Even so, Obama's choice to act swiftly on climate change is heartening. A number of things seem significant about his announcement:

1. Obama has turned environmental NGOs into his allies - he practically had them queuing up to sing his praises, from the Environmental Defense Fund and the Pew Center on Climate Change to Greenpeace.
2. Obama has cross the party divide and made the environmentally progressive Californian governor Schwarzenegger into an ally as well, which bodes well for the future.
3. Obama has virtually accused his predecessor (and the oil and motor industry lobby) of climate change denial, saying "my administration will not deny facts; we will be guided by them".
4. And finally, Obama has made a bold declaration that "America is ready to lead" on climate change. Given their current position as laggards, they will have to cover a huge amount of ground in the coming 12 months to give that statement any substance.

The months and years ahead - especially Obama's promise to introduce a cap-and-trade system and the world's hope that the US will play a productive role in reaching a post-Kyoto deal - will give us plenty of opportunity to test (and no doubt criticise) Obama's commitment. But for now, I think we should relish the winds of change blowing - they don't come too often.

Source:

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