

# Can U.S., China find common ground in climate talks?

September 15 2009, By Renee Schoof and Margaret Talev

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The U.S. and China should be able to agree on energy cooperation projects that reduce greenhouse gases and lead to a successful outcome at international climate talks in Copenhagen in December, two U.S. climate insiders said Tuesday.

Former Sen. Timothy Wirth of Colorado, who's been meeting with climate negotiators from other countries in his role as the director of the United Nations Foundation, said the two countries won't agree on how much each side should cut emissions and shouldn't get bogged down trying. Instead, he said, they should talk about energy efficiency, [renewable energy](#), new possibilities for shale gas and other areas of cooperation.

"There's a whole menu where we can agree without getting into an ideological-purity discussion of who reduces how much," Wirth said. "Let's grab those opportunities and make them the core of the Copenhagen outcome."

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., said the U.S. and China "are really going to set the tone for the international climate change dialogue. The crucial question is can we together forge a partnership that's capable of acting boldly enough to prevent a climate catastrophe."

Kerry said he was "very hopeful" the two countries would soon announce some agreements.

Kerry said that because China is still a developing country -- "powerful and rich in some places, but still with a huge portion of its population living on less than \$1 a day" -- it can make emissions reductions "on a different level from the United States, as we have agreed in prior meetings, but it must be measurable, reportable and verifiable."

The U.S., the developed world's largest source of [greenhouse gas](#) emissions, and China, the biggest source in the [developing world](#), together contribute about 40 percent of global warming pollution. The two countries have been meeting to try to find common ground before the international talks.

The U.N. negotiations leading up to that meeting have been difficult, marked by the same rhetoric of the past nearly two decades, U.S. climate negotiator Todd Stern said on Capitol Hill last week. Three meetings are planned this week and next to try to boost prospects -- a Major Economies Forum for Energy and Climate in Washington; a meeting of Group of 20 finance ministers in Pittsburgh; and a special climate session of the U.N. General Assembly.

Also Tuesday, the Obama administration announced a long-expected step to reduce emissions from transportation. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood proposed tougher standards for national fuel economy, with an average standard of 35.5 mpg by 2016.

President Barack Obama announced the higher national fuel economy standards in May. California had led the charge among states to get automakers to raise the standards, while automakers had insisted on a national standard, arguing that it would be impossible to comply with different state rules.

While the new rules are likely to make vehicles slightly more expensive

in the short run, Jackson said that over the life of a 2016 model year vehicle, owners would save at least \$3,000 in lower fuel costs. She said the emissions reductions would be equivalent to taking 42 million cars off the road.

The Obama administration also would like Congress to finish a bill on energy and climate before the Copenhagen negotiations, but that's far from certain. Support in the Senate is in doubt, and debate won't even begin until after health care revamp wraps up.

Wirth said that many people are impatient for mandatory emissions reduction and a similar trading scheme globally. "There isn't going to be one," he said, because it's too complicated.

"We're not going to solve the world's climate and energy problems with one agreement in Copenhagen," Wirth said.

He argued, however, that the December negotiations would be a success if they produce some "building blocks" such as:

- A plan with a deadline for "universal access to energy sources."
- A doubling of [energy efficiency](#). "This pays for itself," Wirth said. "It's very good climate and energy policy."
- A plan for 20 percent of global electricity from renewable sources by 2020.
- A reduction in the rate of deforestation by 25 percent early in the next decade and by 50 percent by 2020.
- Technology transfer, particularly in the areas of natural gas and for the capture and permanent underground storage of carbon dioxide, the main

[global warming](#) gas.

- Help for poor countries to adapt to climate changes that can't be avoided.

The World Bank released a report on Tuesday that said developing countries could reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases without sacrificing growth if developed countries provide financial and technical help. Research and development costing \$100 billion to \$700 billion annually will be needed. Currently, worldwide government spending is about \$13 billion a year, while private investment totals \$40 billion to \$60 billion, the report said.

The investment will mainly come from the private sector acting in its own interest in response to new regulations and investment opportunities, said Katherine Sierra, the vice president for sustainable development at the World Bank.

Two other sources of funds depend on the outcome of the international climate negotiations: a carbon market source, which includes money raised from the sale of emissions allowances and from offsets, which are payments from polluters for reductions of greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere; and aid from developed countries for global adaptation to [climate](#) change.

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