

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Campaign Launches to Cut Methane, Soot and Reduce Climate Change

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 16 February 2012

Washington — The United States and a group of international partners launched a new battle in the campaign against climate change February 16, forming a coalition to reduce the release of a subgroup of greenhouse gases (GHG) that have an oversized effect on global warming.

The Climate and Clean Air Coalition will target methane, soot and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), which account for one-third of global warming according to researchers. Implementing an array of relatively simple control measures — such as reducing agricultural burn-offs and emissions from diesel engines — will slow global warming a significant amount.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced the new coalition in a State Department ceremony. She was joined by ministers from the partner nations of Bangladesh, Canada, Ghana, Mexico and Sweden and the head of the U.N. Environment Programme, which will serve as the secretariat for the new coalition.

“The Climate and Clean Air Coalition will spread practical ideas and practices regarding so-called short-lived pollutants which remain in the atmosphere for only a short time,” Clinton said. Acknowledging that excessive carbon dioxide emissions remain the most serious cause of climate change, Clinton said these pollutants also have serious adverse consequences in the damage they do to crops and to individual health.

“Millions die annually from constantly breathing in black-carbon soot that comes from cookstoves in their own homes, from diesel cars and trucks on their roads, from the open burning of agricultural waste in their fields,” Clinton said. Methane, another GHG to be targeted by this coalition, is a precursor to ground-level ozone, another health irritant.

Emissions of these pollutants can be controlled with existing knowledge through such actions as installing filters in diesel vehicles and upgrading cooking stoves and boilers to use cleaner-burning fuels. The Obama administration is already pursuing these actions with the imposition of tougher emissions standards for diesel vehicles domestically and an international program to help developing-world families adopt cleaner technologies for cooking at home, the Clean Cookstove Initiative.

Lisa Jackson, administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, joined the secretary of state for the

announcement and described another U.S. program to help countries reduce methane emissions. Jackson said the United States has invested \$60 million in methane-reduction programs in 18 countries over the last several years.

“This is truly a great day for the global environment and all who share it,” said Canadian Environment Minister Peter Kent. He called the new coalition’s emphasis on practical approaches to reducing the short-lived pollutants a key component to international activities to address climate change, notably the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change.

He also cited Canada’s interest in its Arctic territories and the need for action to contain the effects of climate change that are already visible in the world’s northernmost reaches.

Representatives from five partner nations also delivered remarks. Bangladesh Minister of Environment Hasan Mahmud cited evidence that the targeted pollutants cause more than 500,000 deaths in Southeast Asia each year. His country is pursuing action to reduce these emissions. “More than 400,000 improved and efficient cookstoves have been distributed, replacing conventional inefficient cookstoves,” he said.

Mahmud said the coalition should promote knowledge-sharing and good practices to make further reductions in GHGs.

Mexican Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources Juan Elvira said climate change initiatives are gaining momentum in his country with new strategies being implemented in all of its 31 states and 200 municipalities also developing initiatives. He said the new coalition will be “transformative at technical and political levels,” and expressed hope that more nations will get involved.

Swedish Minister of Environment Lena Ek said the Climate and Clean Air Coalition will be “a collation for action, not talking.”

U.N. Environment Programme Executive Director Achim Steiner, who will play a significant role in the day-to-day operations of the coalition, focused his remarks on the international teams of researchers whose work has revealed the significant impact of the short-lived gases.

These scientists, Steiner said, are “allowing us to unravel and comprehend what is happening in our world,” but policymakers must see the opportunity to take action on their findings. The formation of this coalition, Steiner said, is a tribute to that spirit of action.

The scientific case for taking these actions has been building for almost a decade, but one of the definitive studies was released just in January. Led by Drew Shindell of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, the research found that reductions of these particular GHGs could increase global crop yields by up to 135 million metric tons per season. Further, hundreds of thousands of premature deaths due to respiratory problems would be prevented with implementation of pollution-reduction methods.

"We've shown that implementing specific practical emissions reductions chosen to maximize climate benefits also would have important 'win-win' benefits for human health and agriculture," Shindell said on release of that study.

Soot emissions — also called black carbon — result from burning fossil fuels or biomass. They can worsen a variety of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. They aggravate global warming by absorbing radiation from the sun. Widely emitted from smokestacks and chimneys, they eventually settle back down to earth, darkening ice and snow, reducing reflectivity and pushing temperatures higher.

Colorless and flammable methane is a precursor to ground-level ozone, which is linked to smog and a number of respiratory problems.

Congressional Leaders Meet with China's Xi Jinping

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 15 February 2012

Washington — Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping wrapped up a two-day visit in Washington February 15 with meetings on Capitol Hill with U.S. Senate leaders and a speech to the U.S.-China Business Council before heading to America's heartland for a visit with old friends in Iowa.

Xi met February 15 with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and other members from both political parties. In a speech before the U.S.-China Business Council, Xi told executives that the United States and China must continue to build mutual understanding and trust as they seek ways to resolve differences.

Vice President Biden is hosting Xi after the two met in Beijing in August 2011. The reciprocal visits between the two vice presidents were announced by President Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao during the latter's visit to Washington last year.

On February 14, Xi met with Obama, Biden and senior

U.S. Cabinet officials at the White House to discuss a wide range of economic and trade issues, security and military issues, human rights concerns, and regional and global challenges. They also discussed North Korea and its nuclear weapons development program, Iran and its weapons development program and the escalating violence in Syria.

Xi met with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Army General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the Pentagon on February 14. In addition to being China's vice president, Xi also is vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission. It is anticipated that Xi will become China's next president in March 2013, further underscoring the importance of this visit to the United States.

Obama told reporters before an Oval Office meeting with Xi that the United States is focused on strengthening its Asia-Pacific relationships and enhancing U.S. trade with the region. The United States, Obama added, wants to ensure it is an effective partner with the Asia-Pacific region, and that means an effective relationship with China.

After visiting the Pentagon, Xi and Biden addressed the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington. Biden told Chinese and U.S. business leaders that the United States will continue to ensure that all nations play by the same set of international trade rules. "We've brought cases that have challenged unfair trade practices, and we've defended U.S. producers and workers in many arenas," Biden said.

"I'm sure, as the vice president [Xi] will be the first to tell you, we have work to do — especially on issues like discriminatory subsidies and financing, protecting intellectual property and trade secrets, and ending the practice of making the transfer of technology a requirement for doing business," Biden said.

Xi told the executives that the active participation of business executives in both nations has made the U.S.-China economic relationship "more colorful and more dynamic."

In Iowa later on February 15 and February 16, Xi will visit Muscatine, where he stayed in 1985 on an agricultural exchange trip. He will be joined by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke. A formal dinner with Iowa Governor Terry Branstad will be held in Des Moines.

While in Muscatine, Xi will attend a tea with many of the residents of the small eastern Iowa farming community who were his hosts during his stay there in 1985. The trip to Iowa is in part to reconnect with many of the

Americans he met on his first trip to the United States, and also to meet with significant members of Iowa's farming industry, which supplies considerable amounts of food to China.

According to U.S. trade statistics, China exported about \$3 billion of agricultural products to the United States in 2010, but imported more than \$17 billion in U.S. agricultural products. Soybeans made up \$11 billion of those imports, according to an Iowa State University economist. China has become the top destination for U.S. farm exports, economist Dermot Hayes told VOA News.

Chinese and American officials will attend the first U.S.-China Agriculture Symposium in Des Moines on February 16. On February 17, Biden rejoins Xi in Los Angeles for private meetings. Xi and Biden will visit a school in Los Angeles and be introduced to students who are studying Chinese.

Local Leaders Working to Reduce U.S. Demand for Drugs

By Lauren Monsen | Staff Writer | 15 February 2012

Washington — Across the United States, thousands of community leaders are working to implement a variety of innovative, compassionate and evidence-based drug policies to reduce U.S. demand for illegal drugs, says the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP).

Ten such leaders — educators, physicians, law enforcement professionals, social workers and people in recovery for substance abuse — were recently honored at the White House as “Champions of Change.” All represent organizations and programs that tackle illegal drug use by emphasizing a public-health approach over incarceration: a key theme of President Obama's anti-drug strategy.

The president's strategy aims to prevent drug use before it begins and to help addicts enter treatment, while also cooperating with neighboring countries on law enforcement. Aggressively working to reduce U.S. drug consumption not only improves public health and safety in the United States, but also deprives violent transnational criminal organizations of an important source of income, according to the ONDCP.

U.S. “Champions of Change” demonstrate that demand-reduction policies can sharply reduce drug use and its consequences, said ONDCP Communications Director Rafael Lemaitre.

Daniel Gannon, a 25-year veteran of Rhode Island's Providence Police Department, is a “Champion of

Change” whose efforts in the Lockwood neighborhood of Providence have made a substantial difference over a five-year span.

In 2006, Gannon helped introduce the Drug Market Intervention program, which disrupts open-air drug markets by directly engaging drug dealers. The program creates and enforces clear, predictable sanctions while also providing a range of services — including drug treatment — to low-level offenders, giving them a chance to break the cycle of drug use, trafficking and incarceration.

“It takes the really bad drug runners off the streets,” but also helps those who are not hard-core drug abusers “so they can be returned to their communities,” said Gannon. The program has been adopted in jurisdictions across the United States, and “it's been successful everywhere.”

Cindy Schaidler, another “Champion of Change,” is executive director of the Casa Grande Alliance, a community-based drug abuse prevention coalition in Casa Grande, Arizona. Each year, the organization reaches more than 20,000 people with its prevention materials and messages, and its efforts are credited with significantly reducing drug use among youth as well as underage drinking in the Casa Grande area.

“We're a 45-member, completely voluntary community coalition; our goal is to form partnerships and work together to prevent drug abuse,” said Schaidler. “We want to see our community be a place of safety and joy.” The alliance has served as a model for similar programs in other countries: Schaidler has worked with members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland in community development techniques during their transition from the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

U.S. interdiction and enforcement efforts, too, are increasingly coupled with youth-based drug abuse prevention efforts, as “Champion of Change” Timothy Wagner explained. Wagner is director of the South Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force Program, and under his leadership, the South Florida HIDTA dismantled or disrupted 131 drug trafficking/drug money-laundering organizations in 2010.

While the South Florida HIDTA brings together federal, state and local agencies' resources to work cooperatively and share intelligence, it also administers teen-oriented programs that educate youngsters about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. “As long as the demand is there and the profit is there, law enforcement will not be a complete solution,” said Wagner.

The work of these “Champions of Change,” and others,

complements the president's vision of a balanced strategy instead of "an unproductive, enforcement-only 'war on drugs' approach," said ONDCP's Lemaitre. The White House supports the expansion of drug courts as an alternative to prison for nonviolent offenders and the use of family-centered re-entry programs that help ex-offenders successfully transition into society.

Many community-based initiatives offering substance-abuse treatment, employment, mentoring and other services can be duplicated around the United States and also outside the country, and ONDCP is always interested in innovative new programs, said Lemaitre.

"There is no simple, straightforward fix to America's drug problem," he said. A broad approach "that blends drug treatment, smart law enforcement and effective alternatives to incarceration ... can break the vicious cycle of drug use and crime, thereby saving countless lives and taxpayer dollars and helping to make it possible for all Americans to achieve their full potential."

To learn more about U.S. drug-control policies, visit the ONDCP page on the White House website.

Obama and Chinese Vice President Xi Before Their Meeting

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
February 14, 2012

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT OBAMA AND
VICE PRESIDENT XI OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF
CHINA
BEFORE BILATERAL MEETING

Oval Office
11:29 A.M. EST

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I want to welcome Vice President Xi to the Oval Office and welcome him to the United States. This is obviously a great opportunity for us to build on the U.S.-China relationship, but also an opportunity to return the extraordinary hospitality that Vice President Xi showed Vice President Biden during his recent visit to China.

As I indicated during my recent visit to APEC and the East Asia Summit, the United States is a Pacific nation. And we are very interested and very focused on continuing to strengthen our relationships, to enhance our trade and our commerce, and make sure that we are a strong and effective partner with the Asia Pacific region. And obviously, in order to do that, it is absolutely vital that we have a strong relationship with China.

Over the last three years I've had a great opportunity to develop a strong working relationship with President Hu. And we have continually tried to move forward on the basis of recognizing that a cooperative relationship based on mutual interest and mutual respect is not only in the interests of the United States and China, but is also in the interest of the region and in the interest of the United States -- in the interest of the world.

On the basis of that understanding, we have established very extensive strategic and economic dialogues between our two countries. We have been able to pursue a significant consultation on opportunities for both countries to improve their economic relationship and their strategic relationship, and also manage areas of tension in a way that is constructive.

That includes working together in the G20 to manage the world economic crisis that had such an impact not only on both our countries, but on the entire world. And because of U.S.-China cooperation, I think that we were able to help stabilize the situation at a very difficult time. It also includes the work that we've been able to do together in dealing with regional hotspot issues, like the Korean Peninsula, and issues like Iran that obviously have an impact on everybody.

Throughout this process I have always emphasized that we welcome China's peaceful rise, that we believe that a strong and prosperous China is one that can help to bring stability at prosperity to the region and to the world. And we expect to be able to continue on the cooperative track that we've tried to establish over the last three years.

We have tried to emphasize that because of China's extraordinary development over the last two decades, that with expanding power and prosperity also comes increased responsibilities. And so we want to work with China to make sure that everybody is working by the same rules of the road when it comes to the world economic system, and that includes ensuring that there is a balanced trade flow between not only the United States and China, but around world.

It also means that on critical issues like human rights, we will continue to emphasize what we believe is the importance of recognizing the aspirations and rights of all people. And we expect that China will continue to take a growing role in world affairs. And we believe that it is critically important that the United States and China develop a strong working relationship to help to bring stability, order, and security that ultimately provides a better life for both the people of the United States and the people of China.

So, Mr. Vice President, I hope you have a wonderful visit while you're here. I'm sure the American people welcome

you. I'm glad that you're going to get an opportunity to get out of Washington. I know you'll be visiting Iowa, where you visited many years ago when you were governor. And I understand you're also going to be going to Los Angeles and maybe even taking in a Lakers game. So I hope you enjoy that very much.

But I want to extend my deepest welcome to you, and look forward to a future of improved dialogue and increased cooperation in the years to come.

VICE PRESIDENT XI: (As interpreted.) Honorable President Obama, it's my great pleasure to meet you again. First of all, I'd like to convey the sincere greetings from President Hu Jintao, the National People's Congress Chairman Wu Banguo, and Premier Wen Jiabao.

I am paying an official visit to the United States at the kind invitation of Vice President Biden. And we have received the warm and extraordinary hospitality from our hosts. So here, I want to thank you for your personal attention and what you did to help prepare and make sure a successful visit for myself.

The main purpose of my visit is to implement the important agreement you had reached with President Hu Jintao and to do some work to move forward the China-U.S. relationship along in the right direction, set by you and President Hu -- that is for our two countries to work together to build a cooperative partnership based on mutual respect and mutual interests. And I hope to engage with a broad cross-section of American society during my current visit, so as to deepen mutual understanding, expand consensus, strengthen cooperation, and deepen the friendship between the Chinese and American people.

Yesterday evening, soon after my arrival in Washington, D.C., I met with a very distinguished group of veteran U.S. political leaders. I sought their advice on the future development of our relationship, and their wise and practical suggestions have provided me with much food for thought.

Just now I've had a set of large and small talks with Vice President Biden. He and I had an extensive, candid, and in-depth exchange of views on the bilateral relationship and international and regional issues of shared interest. Building on our discussions last August in Beijing and Chengdu, the Vice President and I reached some new consensus.

I look forward to my in-depth discussion with you, President Obama, in our meeting today.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you, everybody.

Panetta Presents \$614 Billion Defense Budget Request to Congress

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 14 February 2012

Washington — Defense Secretary Leon Panetta presented U.S. lawmakers with the Pentagon's \$614 billion budget request for the year starting October 1, a significant drop from last year's request, representing cuts across the department intended to help reduce the U.S. deficit.

Panetta said the United States is "at a strategic turning point" during testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee February 14.

The budget request, which is \$32 billion less than the 2012 budget, would help meet a congressional mandate passed in 2011 to reduce the defense budget by \$487 billion over the next decade.

Army General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified along with Panetta and said that while the budget tradeoffs were tough and complex, they "will not lead to a military in decline."

Panetta said cuts were helped by progress made in 2011, including the end of the military mission in Iraq and significant steps taken to reduce violence and transition security in Afghanistan to the country's own forces.

"But despite what we have been able to achieve, unlike past drawdowns when threats have receded, the United States still faces a very complex array of security challenges across the globe," Panetta testified.

In addition to being engaged in continued military operations in Afghanistan, Panetta said, the United States faces terrorism threats and the dangerous proliferation of lethal weapons and materials around the world.

"Iran and North Korea continue to threaten global stability. There is continuing turmoil and unrest in the Middle East, from Syria to Egypt to Yemen and beyond. Rising powers in Asia are testing international rules and relationships, and there are growing concerns about cyber intrusions and attacks," he said.

Panetta said the Defense Department's challenge is to "meet these threats, to protect our nation and our people and at the same time meet our responsibility to fiscal discipline."

He said the savings of \$259 billion during the next five years will come from several areas, including cutting tens of thousands of troops, reducing the fleet of U.S. warplanes, cutting back on shipbuilding and delaying the purchase of certain weapons systems.

"This is going to be a tough challenge, but it's what the American people expect of its elected leaders: to be fiscally responsible in developing the force for the future," Panetta said. Looking ahead, he said funds will be allocated for investing in the latest technologies, international partnership programs and increasing the focus on areas of growing strategic priority, such as the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions.

Some lawmakers expressed concerns about increased risks posed by the slimmed-down budget, but Panetta said a thorough review of the request showed the risks to be minimal in light of the need to reduce the nation's projected \$1.3 trillion deficit for 2012.

"It was this Congress that mandated, on a bipartisan basis, that we reduce the defense budget," Panetta said. "This will be a test of whether reducing the deficit is about talk or action."

The hearing marked the start of several days of testimony on Capitol Hill focused on the 2013 defense budget.

Biden and China's Xi Jinping Begin High-Level Talks

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 14 February 2012

Washington — Vice President Biden opened his meeting with Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping by saying that a strong U.S.-China relationship is one of the most important to both nations and also is significant to the world.

Biden told Xi in brief remarks before beginning their meeting that his visit to Washington "continues the sustained high-level dialogue between our two countries."

"We're not always going to see things exactly the same. But we have very important economic and political concerns that warrant that we work together," Biden said February 14 as they began meeting in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Biden set the tone for the second in a series of meetings with Xi by adding that it is a sign of strength and maturity in the two-way relationship that the United States and China are able to talk candidly about their differences and then make progress bridging those differences.

Biden is hosting Xi after the two met in Beijing in August 2011. The reciprocal visits were announced by President Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao during the latter's state visit to Washington last year. While in Washington, Xi is meeting with Obama, Biden and other senior U.S. Cabinet officials to discuss a wide range of

economic and trade issues, security and military issues, human rights concerns, and also regional and global challenges.

Talks were expected to include North Korea and its nuclear weapons development program, Iran and its weapons development program, and concerns about escalating violence and civil strife in Syria.

Xi was expected to meet with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Army General Martin Dempsey at the Pentagon, and also to meet with leaders from the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives before leaving for Iowa.

Obama told reporters in an Oval Office meeting with Xi that the United States is focused on strengthening its Asian relationships and seeks "to enhance our trade and our commerce, and make sure that we are a strong and effective partner with the Asia-Pacific region."

"In order to do that, it is absolutely vital that we have a strong relationship with China," Obama said. On that basis, the two nations have developed extensive strategic and economic dialogues, he added.

Obama also noted that the improving relationship has helped in managing areas of tension in constructive ways.

"That includes working together in the G20 [Group of 20 advanced economies] to manage the world economic crisis that had such an impact not only on both our countries, but on the entire world," Obama said. "It also includes the work that we've been able to do together in dealing with regional hot spot issues, like the Korean Peninsula, and issues like Iran that obviously have an impact on everybody."

After a two-day visit in Washington, Xi travels to the state of Iowa for meetings with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Governor Terry Branstad, who was also governor when Xi visited the state in 1985. Xi is expected to travel to the town of Muscatine, which he visited on an exchange program when still an agricultural official in Hebei, Iowa's sister province. Xi then travels on to Los Angeles where he will rejoin talks with Biden.

The United States has been working to strengthen its relations in East Asia through the East Asia Summit, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, which Obama hosted last year in Hawaii. Obama also recently completed a trip across the region to expand U.S. trade and reaffirm U.S. security commitments, which are seen as a significant source for stability and security in the 21st century.

U.S. relations with China include significant security issues in the Middle East, global economic issues and security issues in Northeast Asia.

Xi said that he hoped his weeklong visit to the United States would expand on the consensus reached by Obama and Hu last year to “promote the building of a China-U.S. cooperative partnership based on mutual respect and mutual advantages.”

“Also through this visit, I hope to engage with a broad cross section of American society to deepen the mutual understanding, consensus and the friendship between the Chinese and American people,” Xi said.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton welcomed Xi to the Department of State at a luncheon in his honor, noting that this year marks the 40th anniversary of President Richard Nixon’s historic trip to China.

“Today, cooperation between the United States and China is imperative to address the many vexing challenges we face, from countering proliferation to addressing climate change to promoting global economic security,” Clinton said. “Now, developing the habits of cooperation is not easy. But we are both committed to building a lasting framework of trust that will support a cooperative partnership for the next 40 years and beyond.”

Obama Seeks \$51.6 Billion for Fiscal Year 2013 Foreign Operations

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 14 February 2012

Washington – President Obama has proposed \$51.6 billion in spending for foreign operations in fiscal year 2013, which begins October 1, 2012.

The proposed amount submitted to Congress February 13 is up 1.6 percent from the amount Congress approved for fiscal year 2012 and would fund the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development and other international programs. The proposal must be approved or modified by the Senate and House of Representatives before going to the president for signature or veto. The proposal may meet resistance in Congress as some lawmakers want to cut foreign aid spending to address U.S. budget shortfalls.

The proposal would invest in long-term partnerships to strengthen diplomatic, development and security activities in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iraq would receive \$4.8 billion – about 10 percent less than in 2012 – to fund police training, military transition, health, education, private-sector development and public outreach. Afghanistan would get \$4.6 billion to fight terrorism and for programs in governance, rule of law,

counternarcotics, economic growth, agriculture, health and education. Pakistan would receive \$2.4 billion in aid to assist in strengthening democratic and civil society institutions.

The request includes more than \$800 million to assist countries in transition in the Middle East and North Africa and would create incentives for those countries to adopt long-term political, economic and trade reforms.

The president’s budget would advance HIV prevention efforts, including support for 6 million HIV patients who receive antiretroviral drugs. The budget would invest nearly \$8 billion in the President’s Global Health Initiative, fully fund the balance of the administration’s \$4 billion pledge to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and fulfill its pledge to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations to expand children’s access to immunizations globally.

The requested spending would continue support for agricultural development and nutrition through the president’s Feed the Future initiative and the multi-donor Global Agriculture and Food Security Program. Those programs direct funding to countries that commit to policy reforms and strong country-led strategies that address local food needs. The requested amount would maintain support for food aid and humanitarian assistance, including more than \$4 billion to help internally displaced persons, refugees and victims of armed conflict and natural disasters.

The request also provides \$2.9 billion to the Treasury Department to meet U.S. commitments to the multilateral development banks and for bilateral debt relief, and includes \$432 million to help five international trade-related agencies promote international trade and tourism. It proposes nearly \$900 million for the Millennium Challenge Corporation, \$375 million for the Peace Corps, and investments to encourage private-sector spending on clean energy and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

For citizens of other countries, the proposed budget includes enhancements in consular services where there is high demand for visas.

One proposed area to get a significant funding reduction is Europe and Eurasia, to reflect the successful transitions to market-based economies in some countries.

MORE FOR AGRICULTURE RESEARCH

The agriculture portion of the budget would increase to \$325 million the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s spending for food and agricultural research targeting global food security, nutrition, food safety, sustainable bioenergy and climate change. It would decrease

subsidies to crop-insurance companies and over 10 years eliminate direct farm payments.

Assad Regime Is Leading Syria Toward Civil War, Clinton Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 13 February 2012

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the Bashar al-Assad regime is leading Syria toward a civil war by escalating its violent crackdown on the Syrian people, and said the United States will continue working with the Arab League, Turkey and other countries to promote a political solution to the crisis.

“It is deplorable that the regime has escalated violence in cities across the country, including using artillery and tank fire against innocent civilians. We stand with the Syrian people and we are looking for a peaceful resolution,” Clinton said February 13 in remarks with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

A civil war in Syria would be an outcome “that we all deplore,” Clinton said.

“We have to encourage the Assad regime and those who support it to understand there is either a path toward peacemaking and democratic transition, which is what we are promoting, or there is a path that leads towards chaos and violence,” she said.

The secretary said the United States is looking forward to participating in the Friends of Syria group that is scheduled to hold its first meeting in Tunisia on February 24.

It is also working to allow the entry of medical supplies and emergency help into Syria and to increase U.S. funding for organizations that can aid the people living without electricity, food and clean water because of the crisis.

“We will play a very active role in trying to search for solutions,” Clinton said, including intensifying the diplomatic pressure on the Assad regime to end the violence, strengthening economic sanctions against the regime and increasing outreach to the Syrian opposition.

“The Syrian people deserve no less than a democratic future, free of government oppression, terrorism and violent extremism,” Clinton said.

U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER URGES INTERNATIONAL ACTION

In remarks to the U.N. General Assembly February 13, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay

said the Security Council’s failure to take action on Syria “appears to have emboldened the Syrian government to launch an all-out assault in an effort to crush dissent with overwhelming force.”

The longer the international community fails to take action, “the more the civilian population will suffer from countless atrocities committed against them,” she said.

Over the past two months, the Syrian government’s “gross, widespread and systematic human rights violations” against its people have not only continued but “sharply escalated,” she said.

Pillay said crimes against humanity are likely to have been committed by Syrian forces as part of “a widespread and systematic attack on civilians.”

“The breadth and patterns of attacks by military and security forces on civilians and the widespread destruction of homes, hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure indicate approval or complicity of the authorities at the highest levels,” she said.

Because the Syrian government will not allow independent human rights watchers or journalists to have free access in the country, Pillay said, her office has not been able to get exact figures on the government’s abuses. But credible reports have shown that during 2011, security forces killed at least 5,400 people, and “we are certain that the number of dead and injured continues to rise every day.”

In addition, tens of thousands of Syrians, including children, have been arrested, with more than 18,000 still reportedly being held. Pillay said thousands more have been reported missing. An estimated 25,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries, and more than 70,000 are estimated to have been internally displaced by the violence, she said.

Obama Budget to Cut Deficit, Support Economic Recovery

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 13 February 2012

Washington – President Obama has sent to Congress his federal budget for fiscal year 2013, a White House road map for how the United States can “grow the economy, create jobs and give Americans everywhere the security they deserve.”

Obama introduced his budget in a February 13 speech at Northern Virginia Community College, located just outside Washington.

“At a time when our economy is growing and creating

jobs at a faster clip, we've got to do everything in our power to keep this recovery on track," the president said.

Obama said doing so will require reducing the national deficit significantly. He said that if adopted by Congress, his proposed budget will reduce U.S. debt by \$4 trillion by the year 2022.

The president said plans to reduce the deficit meant calling for "difficult cuts," including discretionary spending caps, lowered budgets for national health care programs and decreased funding for all federal agencies.

"Every department will feel the impact of these reductions as they cut programs or tighten their belts to free up more resources for areas critical to economic growth," Obama said in his opening statement to the budget. But he said the cuts are necessary, as reducing the nation's long-term deficit allows the country to invest in areas to help grow the economy in the short and medium term.

Obama said his budget offers a blueprint "for an economy that is built to last."

The president said such an economy "demands that we keep doing everything we can to help students learn the skills" that businesses are looking for.

"It means we have to keep strengthening American manufacturing," he added. "It means we've got to keep investing in American energy. We've got to double down on the clean energy that's creating jobs, but it also means we've got to renew the American values of fair play and shared responsibility."

He called for an end to tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas and said the incentive should be given instead to companies creating jobs in the United States. The president said that to reduce its dependence on foreign oil, the United States should end subsidies for oil companies and instead invest in clean energy.

Obama told the college students that his budget also highlights the importance of education and, if passed, would help to make college and skills-training courses more affordable.

"Employers today are looking for the most skilled, educated workers," the president said. "I want businesses to find those workers right here in the United States."

He called on Congress to give schools resources to reward good teachers, to extend tuition tax credits permanently and to keep interest rates on student loans from going up.

Obama said tuition inflation has risen in recent years even

faster than health care inflation, and asked for states and colleges to do their part to keep costs down.

"Higher education cannot be a luxury; it is an economic imperative that every family in America should be able to afford," he said. "That's part of the American promise in the 21st century."

The president's budget needs the approval of Congress to pass before fiscal year 2013 begins October 1.

Supporting Peace, Prosperity, Democracy in Middle East

13 February 2012

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U.S. Department of Treasury Official Blog
February 9, 2012

Supporting Peace, Prosperity, and Democracy in the Middle East and North Africa

Blog Post by Neal Wolin, U.S. deputy secretary of the Treasury

Two years ago, President Obama announced that the United States would broaden its engagement in the Middle East and North Africa, and the Administration has intensified this effort as historic political changes have swept through the region. Recently, I traveled to Israel, the West Bank, Tunisia, and Libya with Deputy Secretary of State Thomas R. Nides to reaffirm that economic cooperation and assistance are critical aspects of our country's diplomatic efforts in this part of the world.

First, we traveled to Israel – a vital partner and ally of the United States – where we reiterated our continued commitment to Israel's political and economic security in meetings with Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon, Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer, National Economic Council Director Eugene Kandel, National Security Adviser Yaakov Amidror, and other government officials.

As part of this commitment, we emphasized that the Obama Administration will work with Congress regarding Israel's request to extend U.S. loan guarantees that have been in place since 2003. Deputy Secretary Nides and I also stressed to our Israeli counterparts that a strong, functioning Palestinian economy is essential to Israel's security and the success of the peace process. We emphasized that Israeli cooperation, including the uninterrupted transfer of customs and other tax revenues,

is essential to Palestinian economic stability and growth.

During our time in the West Bank, in meetings with Prime Minister Fayyad, Palestine Monetary Authority Governor al-Wazir, and representatives from the Palestinian private sector, we strongly encouraged the Palestinian Authority to continue pursuing reforms that promote private sector growth and build effective institutions of governance. These efforts are critical to meeting the aspirations of the Palestinian people and maintaining peace and security. The United States has offered its support through assistance programs, including \$200 million in budget support to the Palestinian Authority in the last fiscal year.

Next, we visited Tunisia, where protests against the Ben Ali regime sparked a wave of political change, now known as the "Arab Spring," throughout the region. The transition currently underway in Tunisia is not only political but also economic. The new government is working to promote more broadly-based economic growth, so more of its citizens benefit from opportunities that previously were limited to a narrow elite. While there, we met with the leaders of the new government, including President Moncef Marzouki and Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, as well as representatives of business and civil society.

The U.S. is committed to helping Tunisia prevail against short-term economic headwinds, including a shortfall in government revenues and increased near-term spending needs. We will provide the new government with loan guarantees so that it can borrow from international markets at affordable rates, and continue to undertake necessary reforms during this crucial transitional period. In addition, the U.S. is also chairing a multilateral initiative – the Deauville Partnership, a new coalition of G-8 countries, international financial institutions, and regional partners – to support the political and economic transitions in Tunisia and other countries in the region.

Libya was our final stop. In February 2011, while the Qadhafi regime was still in power, the United States and other UN members imposed sanctions on Libya to prevent the diversion of more than \$100 billion in worldwide assets that belong to the Libyan people. In December, after Qadhafi was overthrown by the Libyan people with the support of the U.S. and NATO allies, the United States unfroze most protected assets, which the new Libyan government is using to finance post-war reconstruction.

In Treasury's first meetings with the interim government and other officials – including Prime Minister Abdurrahem al-Keeb, Deputy Prime Minister Mustafa Abu Shaghour, Finance Minister Hassan Ziglani, and Central Bank Governor Saddek ElKabeer – we stressed the need for Libya's leadership to stand by its

commitment to manage these financial assets and natural resources transparently and responsibly. We also discussed the need to begin work on economic reforms that promote private sector-led growth and diversify Libya's economy into areas beyond the energy sector.

Everywhere we went – Israel, the West Bank, Tunisia, and Libya – we met with leaders and citizens facing long-standing challenges, but also new opportunities for progress. The U.S. is committed to helping our partners take advantage of these opportunities to achieve peace, political freedom, and economic opportunity.

[Neal S. Wolin is Deputy Secretary of the Treasury.]

Obama Prepares to Submit U.S. Budget for Fiscal Year 2013

By Bridget Hunter | Staff Writer | 13 February 2012

Washington – On February 13, President Obama released his blueprint for how the federal government should spend its money in fiscal year 2013, which begins October 1, 2012.

When he sends Congress *The Budget of the United States Government*, he fulfills a mandate in a 1921 federal law, the Budget and Accounting Act, which requires the president to prepare and submit such a document "no earlier than the first Monday in January, and no later than the first Monday in February."

Historically, presidents have exhibited some flexibility with regard to that deadline. Global and domestic events as well as challenges within the federal government affect the exact timing of the proposal's submission.

The budget reflects the administration's spending priorities and offers specifics to support some of the goals laid out by Obama in his January 24 State of the Union address, such as increasing American manufacturing jobs, strengthening educational systems, encouraging entrepreneurship and developing clean energy sources.

Even though the president's proposed budget will total trillions of dollars, the figure is a fairly low one relative to the nation's overall economic output. Annual spending by the U.S. federal government during the past decade has hovered around 16 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Total government spending, including state and local governments, accounts for about 28 percent of GDP in the United States, a level that is one of the lowest among industrialized nations. In many countries in Western Europe, government spending accounts for half the GDP.

U.S. government spending provides for the public good

— services needed by society that benefit all, but which the private sector has little or no incentive to provide. Such services include the national defense, public safety, education and the management of natural resources. Government activities also include issuing currency, collecting taxes, borrowing money and maintaining economic order.

The U.S. budget is a valuable financial tool, but it is also a powerful way for the president to communicate to Congress and to the citizens the priorities of his administration.

This process is mirrored at the state level, as governors present budget proposals that highlight their priorities to state legislatures for consideration. In state governments, the entire funding process sometimes is concluded within weeks. At the federal level, the process stretches out over many months.

FIRST STEP ON A VERY LONG ROAD

The submission of the president's budget is the starting point for setting federal spending priorities for the fiscal year that begins October 1. Because the Constitution reserves the authority to raise and spend money for the federal government to Congress — the power of the purse — the president's budget is simply a recommendation. The actual spending, or appropriations, will be hammered out over several months in a series of actions in Congress and negotiations between Congress and the White House.

The president's budget process was established in 1921 to increase coordination within the federal government and restrain spending. Previously, individual government agencies had petitioned Congress for funds directly. The shift to a consolidated funding request increased the president's influence over the budget.

The White House prepares the annual budget after consultation with all federal government entities, soliciting information from the various departments and independent agencies to create a funding request that will support government functions effectively and help implement the president's policies, both domestic and international.

The Office of Management and Budget, an agency within the executive branch, is in charge of compiling and analyzing budget data for the White House. It generates the actual budget document, traditionally issued as a multivolume set of large, softcover books, and serves as an advocate for the president's spending policies. President George W. Bush made history in 2008 by releasing his proposed budget for 2009 in electronic formats.

Following the president's submission, Congress gets to work on drafting a dozen separate appropriation bills to fund various categories of spending, such as agriculture, defense or natural resources. These bills include provisions to fund federal government activities and also allocate money to run programs at the state and local level. Appropriation bills can spark fierce debates between Democrats and Republicans, and between senators and representatives. The spending measures most energetically promoted by a member of Congress generally are tied closely to regional, demographic or economic factors in his or her home state.

Additional information on the president's proposed budget for fiscal year 2013 will be made available on the White House website.

Biden and China's Xi Jinping to Hold Crucial Talks

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 11 February 2012

Washington — The weeklong visit to the United States of Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, hosted by Vice President Biden, should be viewed as part of a broader effort by the United States to focus American foreign and economic policies on the Asia-Pacific region, a senior U.S. national security official says.

"A critical part of our Asia-Pacific policy is the very deep relationship and cooperation that we have with China on a range of areas," Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes said February 10.

"We've invested an extraordinary amount of time and energy in the U.S.-China relationship, which can be both cooperative on the range of issues where we work together and, at times, competitive on issues where we differ and where we're reaffirming the rules of the road that all nations must abide by," Rhodes added during a White House briefing February 10 in advance of Xi's visit to Washington February 13.

Biden is hosting Xi after the two met in Beijing in August 2011. The planned reciprocal visits between the two vice presidents were announced by President Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao during the latter's state visit to Washington last year.

While in Washington, Xi will meet with Obama, Biden and other senior U.S. officials and Cabinet members to discuss a wide range of economic, trade, security and military issues, as well as human rights and regional and global challenges.

After a daylong visit to Washington February 14, Xi travels to the state of Iowa for meetings with U.S.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Governor Terry Branstad, who was also governor when Xi visited the state in 1985. Xi is expected to travel to the town of Muscatine, where he visited when still an agricultural official in Hebei, Iowa's sister province. Branstad visited Xi last September in Beijing. Xi then travels to Los Angeles where he will resume talks with Biden, the White House said.

Rhodes also said that a significant aspect of this visit is the opportunity to develop stronger ties with the future leader of China. Xi is expected to become the next president of China in March 2013 following a meeting of the National People's Congress in the fall this year.

"We look at this visit by Vice President Xi as part of the policy continuum, which is in part predicated on the importance of getting the U.S.-China relationship right, which in turn is central to the president's Asia policy," said Daniel Russel, who is senior director for Asian affairs on the National Security Council. "And that involves engaging China, and especially engaging Chinese leadership in ways that increase the quality of our communication and elicit better cooperation," he added during the February 10 briefing.

Russel said that the way the United States deals with China affects its influence and leadership in Asia because this bilateral relationship is closely watched and regarded by other nations of the region. U.S. security advisers told reporters during the briefing that the relationship affects every other nation in the region. U.S. relations with China also include significant security issues in the Middle East, as well as global economic issues and significant security issues in Northeast Asia, the U.S. officials said.

ASIA-PACIFIC REGION AN ADMINISTRATION PRIORITY

The United States under the Obama administration has been working to strengthen its relationship with the regional architecture through the East Asia Summit, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, which Obama hosted last year in Hawaii. Obama also completed a trip across the region in November 2011 to expand U.S. trade relationships, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and reaffirm U.S. security commitments, which are seen as a significant source for stability and security in the 21st century.

An additional component is strengthening relationships — and especially high-level relationships — with President Hu and Premier Wen Jiabao, Russel added. "It helps us to build confidence and avoid surprises in either direction," he said.

Russel said the meetings between Biden and Xi will allow the United States to make clear the strength of U.S. views on key issues, and allow Xi to see the United States anew. He added that the expectation is that Xi "may well become head of the [Chinese Communist] Party" in the fall this year, and then president of China in the spring next year.

Michael Froman, deputy national security adviser for international economics, said the economic relationship with China is one of the most important the United States has in the world. Last year, U.S. exports of goods to China exceeded \$100 billion, and have been growing almost twice as fast as U.S. exports to the rest of the world, he added.

"And over the last few years, we have begun to make progress on a whole range of issues between us, including the exchange rate, which has been appreciating since June 2010," Froman told reporters. "We helped secure China's commitment, both in the G20 [Group of 20 advanced economies] and elsewhere, to reduce its current account surplus, to shift its economic growth model toward greater domestic demand."

China also has agreed to remove certain discriminatory procurement and business innovation policies and to strengthen enforcement of intellectual property rights, he added.

Xi arrives in Washington February 13, but the first full day of talks is February 14, said Antony Blinken, who is Biden's national security adviser. Biden will welcome Xi to the White House for official meetings with senior Cabinet officials, followed by smaller meetings involving Biden and Xi and some senior advisers. Those meetings will be followed by a meeting in the Oval Office of President Obama, Biden and Xi, Blinken added.

Xi will be hosted at a luncheon February 14 with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Biden at the Department of State. Guests will include a cross-section of prominent Americans from government, business, nongovernmental organizations, academia and the arts. Xi, who is also vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission, then will visit the Pentagon for talks with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Army General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to discuss U.S.-China military-to-military affairs.

Biden and Xi will take part in a round-table discussion with American and Chinese business executives at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which is across Lafayette Park from the White House. Before leaving Washington, Biden will host Xi at a dinner at the vice president's official residence — the Naval Observatory.

Xi will meet with members of the U.S. Congress early on February 15 before leaving for Iowa. He will be joined on this part of his visit by Agriculture Secretary Vilsack and U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke. A formal dinner with Governor Branstad and the delegation will be held in Des Moines.

Vilsack will host Xi and Chinese and American officials at the U.S.-China Agriculture Symposium in Des Moines on February 16th, Blinken added. And on February 17, Biden rejoins Xi in Los Angeles for private meetings. Xi and Biden also will visit a local school in Los Angeles and be introduced to students who are studying Chinese. This is intended to emphasize people-to-people ties, especially through education, Blinken said.

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