Final Days: Obama Sends $500M to UN Climate Fund; Trump Vowed to Cancel ‘Global Warming Payments’

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By [Patrick Goodenough](http://www.cnsnews.com/author/patrick-goodenough)

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<http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/final-days-obama-sends-another-500-million-un-climate-fund-trump-has>

 The State Department on Tuesday announced it has transferred a further $500 million to a U.N.-affiliated global climate change fund whose congressional critics have derided as a ‘slush fund” and “handout to foreign bureaucrats.”

The move comes three days before the inauguration of a president who pledged days before his election victory to “[cancel billions in global warming payments](http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/paris-climate-accord-enters-force-administration-doesnt-expect) to the United Nations” and devote funds instead to “environmental infrastructure” at home.

The $500 million is the second transfer to the Green Climate Fund, whose aim is to help developing countries reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapt to occurrences blamed on climate change such as rising sea-levels and drought.

President Obama pledged $3 billion to the GCF over four years, and a first instalment, also $500 million, was paid last March.

Critics in Congress at the time charged that the disbursement was a waste of taxpayers’ money, and pointed out that [Congress had not authorized](http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/slush-fund-senator-slams-state-dept-500-million-payment-green) or appropriated any funding for the GCF.

Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), who has led the criticism, on Tuesday called the latest payment “an insult to American taxpayers.”

“The hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars the Obama administration spent on the United Nations Green Climate Fund were never approved by Congress,” he said.

“The Obama administration is now sending this slush fund another $500 million in its final days in the White House,” Barrasso added. “This is a complete disregard for the will of the voters and an insult to American taxpayers.”

Last week Barrasso questioned President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee for secretary of state, former ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson, about the GCF and other climate funding.

Tillerson did not commit directly to a funding halt, but to a review.

“The Obama administration has unilaterally pledged $3 billion to the U.N. Green Climate Fund. The administration has requested $1.3 billion for global climate change initiatives in this year’s president’s budget for fiscal year 2017,” Barrasso said..

“You mentioned Donald Trump campaigning on ‘America First.’ Will you commit to ensuring no funding will go to the U.N. Green Climate Fund?”

“In consultation with the president,” Tillerson replied, “my expectation is that we’re going to look at all these things from the bottom up, in terms of funds we’ve committed towards this effort.”

The State Department last year responded to questions about the absence of congressional approval by saying it had reviewed its authorities and determined that it was able to make the first payment to the GCF.

State Department spokesman John Kirby on Tuesday said the GCF funding was a continuation of “U.S. government support by this and prior administrations for climate change programs through multilateral funds.”

He described the GCF as “the world’s largest multilateral finance institution dedicated to advancing low-emission, climate-resilient development.”

“The GCF supports developing nations in their efforts to achieve those objectives and to become more resilient to climate change – in turn, reducing the global and national security risks associated with inadequate adaptation to and preparedness for extreme weather events and other climate related impacts,” Kirby said.

At Tuesday’s departmental press briefing, a reporter suggested that it was not fitting, “in the spirit of a smooth transition,”  to send the funds now to a program which the incoming administration has questioned.

Kirby replied that it was “not being done to try to provoke a reaction from the incoming administration or to try to dictate to them, one way or the other, how they are going to deal with climate issues.”

He also said the funds had come from a portion of the Economic Support Fund account for FY2016 that is not earmarked by Congress for specific programs and activities.

**‘Moral and legal obligation’**

The GCF aims to raise $100 billion each year, from public and private sources, by the year 2020 – a goal that was endorsed and incorporated into the Paris climate agreement reached in late 2015.

So far more than 40 governments have pledged a total of some $10 billion to the GCF. Aside from Obama’s $3 billion pledge, the next biggest ones have come from Japan ($1.5 bn), Britain ($1.2 bn), France ($1.03 bn) and Germany ($1.0 bn).

Last year it approved its first projects in developing countries around the world – from flood risk-reduction efforts in Pakistan to early-warning systems in Malawi to the development of argan orchids in Morocco’s “degraded environment” – with a goal of spending $2.5 billion during the course of the year.

Friends of the Earth on Tuesday welcomed the outgoing administration’s transfer, applauding Obama “for providing this urgently needed money to the Green Climate Fund as one of his final acts before leaving office.”

“Republicans in Congress should never have made it so difficult for the world’s wealthiest country to assist the world’s poor as they struggle daily to feed their families and make ends meet on a warming planet,” said the group’s deputy director of economic policy, Karen Orenstein.

“The incoming Trump administration and Congress must not play politics with the moral and legal obligation of the U.S. to provide assistance through the Green Climate Fund for those whose lives and livelihoods are today being devastated by climate change,” she said.

“This must not be twisted into some kind of game to score anti-science political points; the health, well-being and even survival of children and their families are at stake here.”