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## **Mixed Bag for Obama on Climate Change Deal Amid the Recession**

**By JOHN HARWOOD**

COPENHAGEN — On any list of tough sales jobs in American politics, tax increases, higher energy prices and foreign aid would rise to the top.

The worldwide negotiations on curbing [climate change](#) involve all three — while Americans suffer 10 percent unemployment. Yet talks here in Copenhagen drew America's leading Democrats, including [President Obama](#), Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) and Senator [John Kerry](#) of Massachusetts, like moths to a flame.

It provided a fitting coda to Mr. Obama's first year in office. He made policy ambition his hallmark; Congressional Democratic leaders have followed, with historically remarkable early results. But the process has been acrimonious, and all now have sagging poll ratings to prove it.

Perhaps most ambitious is the effort to reshape America's economy in the name of averting environmental disaster, and to persuade foreign rivals to work together toward that goal.

"This is going to be hard," a weary Mr. Obama concluded before leaving Copenhagen. "It's going to be hard within countries. It's going to be even harder between countries.

"One of the things that I've felt very strongly about during the course of this year," he said, "is that hard stuff requires not paralysis, but it requires going ahead and trying to make the best of the situation that you're in."

The chaotic, contentious situation here yielded less than Mr. Obama and his allies had hoped. But Copenhagen treated Mr. Obama more kindly than it did earlier this year in his failed attempt to win the [2016 Olympics](#) for Chicago. His energy and climate change policy goals, at minimum, survived.

When voters assess Mr. Obama's overall agenda in the 2010 midterm elections, survival is an outcome Congressional Democrats would gladly accept.

### **Disappointment**

Thousands of environmental policy makers and advocates left Copenhagen with ample grounds for disappointment. The agreement the United States reached with Brazil, China, India and South Africa lacked commitments to achieve its stated goals, was nonbinding and was not formally affirmed by participants, in any case.

Yet the result fares better when, as in Olympic gymnastics, its scores are adjusted for degree of difficulty.

“Climate change is the hardest political problem the world has ever had to deal with,” The Economist recently declared. If global catastrophe is indeed looming, all countries benefit from avoiding it — but are also powerfully tempted to let others pay for preventing it.

By questioning dire environmental predictions, Mr. Obama’s political adversaries in the United States cast doubt on whether paying for prevention makes sense. That is why the Senate has not followed the House in approving emissions cuts that could raise domestic energy prices, and in sending money overseas to help avert environmental damage.

Senate advocates of climate-change legislation claimed that the momentum from Copenhagen would help prospects for action next year. But obtaining the 60 votes needed to surmount a [filibuster](#) remains an uphill fight.

“Do we have the votes today? No,” Mr. Kerry acknowledged. But Mr. Kerry, the 2004 Democratic presidential nominee, insisted that 60 votes remain “in play.”

“The principal naysayers are those who don’t believe in the science,” he said. “I don’t think they have a lot of credibility.”

### Reshaping Economy

The White House and Congressional Democrats have settled on their climate-change message: strong action can produce energy independence and new economic vitality.

“What would I say to my constituents?” asked Representative [Edward J. Markey](#), a Massachusetts Democrat who is an author of the House-passed bill to reduce carbon emissions. “The largest tax on the American people is the one that’s imposed by the Saudi Arabians and Exxon Mobil. For a very small investment, we can make our own energy here in the United States.”

Ms. Pelosi, the House speaker, makes the argument for action on climate change even simpler.

“The American people should be pleased with this for four reasons: jobs, jobs, jobs and jobs,” Ms. Pelosi said during a break from her advocacy in Copenhagen on climate change, the issue she calls her signature one.

“We are about investing in science to create the new technology and have a new green revolution, so that we can create a new economy.”

It is relatively easy for Ms. Pelosi and Mr. Markey, coastal-state liberals with safe districts, to make those arguments. It is not so easy for vulnerable heartland Democrats who fear that economic disruption for the coal, [oil](#) and utility sectors will produce career-threatening political fallout among not-so-liberal voters.

And energy policy is only the beginning. The \$787 billion economic [stimulus package](#), a health care overhaul and new Wall Street regulations — all major Obama initiatives passed by the House — also provide fat targets for Republican attacks in next year’s campaigns.

“We’ve had a very challenging work year,” Ms. Pelosi said. “It’s hard to bake the pie and sell the pie at same

time. Now we'll sell it.”

Like everything about Mr. Obama's debut, that will not be easy.

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