

The Energy 202: Today is Biden's 'Climate Day.' Here's what to expect.

By [Dino Grandoni](#) Jan. 27, 2021 at 5:45 a.m. PST with *Alexandra Ellerbeck*

President Biden is preparing a slew of executive orders Wednesday building out the new administration's agenda for tackling climate change, in what is being dubbed "Climate Day."

The moves on drilling for oil and gas, conserving nature and addressing the racial and economic disparities of pollution fulfill several campaign promises. They are meant to put the United States on the path to net-zero emissions by the middle of the century and come off the heels of Biden moving to rejoin the Paris climate accord and nix the Keystone XL pipeline on [his first day in office](#).



President Biden delivers remarks at the White House. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

The directives, coming on a day Biden officials hope is remembered more favorably than [Trump's multiple and largely fruitless "infrastructure weeks,"](#) are already being hailed by environmentalists as necessary for slowing dangerous warming. And they're being derided by the oil and gas sector and other industries for hampering economic growth.

Here's some of what we're expecting from the White House:

- **Oil and gas leasing:** Perhaps biggest move is Biden's expected decision to halt new oil

and gas leasing on federal lands, [as Juliet Eilperin and I reported](#). The drafted moratorium would not affect activity around existing leases, but would pause auctions for the right to drill on new parcels throughout much of the west as well as in the Gulf of Mexico. The order will also not restrict energy development on tribal lands.

- **Addressing environmental justice:** The Biden administration will establish at least three different bodies meant to address the unequal impact of dirty air and water on poor and minority communities — an office of health and climate equity at the Health and Human Services Department, an environmental justice office at the Justice Department and a third interagency council at the White House, [as Eilperin reports with Brady Dennis and Darryl Fears](#). The White House will also establish another cross-government group to help communities transition away from fossil fuels.
- **Protecting nature:** Biden also is planning to instruct the government to set aside nearly a third of the nation's land and water by the end of the decade for conservation. Biden [pledged](#) during the campaign to pursue that "30 by 30" goal as means of blunting the buildup of greenhouse gases by sequestering carbon and preserving habitat for threatened plants and animals.
- **Tackling super pollutants:** Biden will tell the State Department to send to the Senate the Kigali Amendment, an international agreement to slash the use of a group of human-made compounds that both contribute to climate change and deplete the ozone layer. The Trump administration never submitted the treaty to Congress

despite the [urging](#) of both business groups and several congressional Republicans.

- **Kick-starting an “all-of-government” approach:** Biden direct every agency to factor climate change into the decisions they make, including purchasing electric vehicles, getting power from carbon-free sources and bolstering the buildings and other federal facilities to the impacts of rising temperatures.

Many environmentalists said they hoped the halt on oil and gas leasing would lead to a more permanent ban.

"The administration's review, if done correctly, will show that filthy fracking and drilling must end for good, everywhere," said Kierán Suckling, executive director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

But the oil and gas sector, along with other business groups, are gearing up to fight even as they say they want to work with the new administration.

Marty Durbin of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a major business lobbying group, said he is happy to see the United States rejoin the Paris accord but added even a temporary pause of leasing would be harmful during an economic recession.

"It's never a good time to ramp down domestic energy production, but right now, in the middle of a pandemic, when our nation is in desperate need of economic recovery, it's particularly bad," he said.

Biden's climate agenda is facing an early test on Capitol Hill.

Coinciding with the White House's climate-themed day, former Michigan governor Jennifer Granholm, [Biden's pick for energy secretary](#), is set to testify Wednesday in front of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Several of the Republicans on the panel have already excoriated the Biden administration for

actions they say will stymie the domestic energy sector, leading to job loss and a heightened dependence on foreign sources of fuel.



Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) speaks on Capitol Hill. (Jim Watson/AFP via Getty Images)

Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, who is set to become the panel's top Republican, said the actions undermined Biden's gesture toward unifying the bitterly divided country during his inauguration address.

"President Biden said he would be a president for every American," he said in a statement. "His first executive actions don't reflect that sentiment. The president's executive orders will kill jobs and create additional burdens for businesses and communities that are already suffering."

Some Republicans also used the nomination hearing Tuesday for Gina Raimondo, the commerce secretary nominee, to criticize Biden's environmental policies, [Roll Call reports](#). Sen. Ted Cruz (Tex.) said that Biden's decision to rescind the Keystone pipeline had resulted in lost jobs. Sen. Rick Scott (Fla.) raised concerns that climate policies could raise the costs of energy.

Power plays

The Dakota Access pipeline lost a key court appeal.

A federal appeals court upheld a district court judge's decision to scrap a key permit for the project but stopped short of ordering the pipeline to shut down, [Bloomberg News reports](#).

The court ruled that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should have conducted a more extensive environmental review. It also vacated the pipeline's authority to cross federally owned land, casting uncertainty on the project's future.



Protesters of the Dakota Access oil pipeline in North Dakota. (Terray Sylvester/Reuters)

The 1,172-mile pipeline extends from North Dakota to Illinois, crossing beneath the Missouri River, north of the the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. The project has faced legal challenges from Native American tribes and environmental groups who say that the pipeline promotes the use of fossil fuels and could threaten a drinking water source for the tribes. Advocates are expected to capitalize on the court case to push the Biden administration to shut down the pipeline.

Biden rescinded a permit for the Keystone XL pipeline in his first day in office. In addition to pressure over the Dakota Access pipeline, the Biden administration [may also face pressure](#) to halt the Canadian-U. S. cross-border Line 3 pipeline.

BlackRock chief Larry Fink is calling for companies to reach net zero by 2050.

The asset management boss sent a letter to the world's corporate leaders asking them to disclose how they will eliminate net greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century, [the New York Times reports](#). Controlling \$9 trillion, BlackRock is the world's most powerful

investor, giving its positions on climate major weight throughout the financial system.

“We expect you to disclose how this plan is incorporated into your long-term strategy and reviewed by your board of directors,” Fink wrote.



Larry Fink, chief executive officer of BlackRock. (Simon Dawson/Bloomberg News)

The letter comes as freshly confirmed Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and the rest of the Biden administration say they will set tax, regulatory and budget policy with the climate risks in mind.

In turn, BlackRock is creating sustainability-oriented index funds that can exclude companies that don't meet certain green standards. It also plans to start publishing a metric for public equity and bond funds indicating to what extent they align with clean-energy targets.

Climate litigation is ramping up around the world.

A new [United Nations report](#) finds that climate litigation has become more common and successful around the world. In 2017 there were 884 climate cases filed in 24 countries. By the end of 2020, the number of cases has nearly doubled, with at least 1,550 cases filed in 38 countries. The majority of those, around 1,200, were filed in the United States, the report states.

The litigation includes efforts to seek corporate liability for climate-related damage, as well as suits aimed at holding companies to account for

The Washington Post

fraudulent or misleading statements about their climate risk.

Biden directed agencies to increase consultation with Native American communities.

The president signed a memo Tuesday directing agencies to develop plans for improving consultation with the nation's 574 federally recognized tribes, [the Hill reports](#). Although federal policy already requires consultation, tribal leaders have complained that they are often sidelined in the decision-making process with federal agencies.

"It is a priority of my administration to make respect for Tribal sovereignty and self-governance, commitment to fulfilling federal trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal Nations, and regular, meaningful, and robust consultation with Tribal Nations cornerstones of Federal Indian policy," Biden wrote in the memo.

Extra mileage

Scientists discovered a new whale species in the Gulf, but it's critically endangered.

A new study led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration confirms that a population of whales in the Gulf Coast of Mexico is a new species. The whales were previously thought to be a rare species known as Bryde's whales, but they behaved differently from other Bryde whales, dining in deep water instead of catching fish near the surface and staying closer to home, [Nola reports](#).

Using DNA and skeletal remains, NOAA confirmed that the Gulf of Mexico whales were, in fact, a new species, which will now be known as "Rice's whale" after the biologist Dale Rice,



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who first recognized the population of whales in the Gulf Coast 60 years ago.



The whales are teetering on the edge of extinction.

"Only about 33 of the whales are likely alive today, according to the most recent NOAA estimate, and they prefer the deep, dark waters of DeSoto Canyon, one of the busiest commercial areas of the Gulf, where cargo ships and oil drilling are a constant threat," Nola writes.