President Should Make Climate Change a ‘Center-Piece’ of Second Term

Great presidential leadership should be exerted now to help promote a “sustainable future,” writes leading environmental law expert David M. Uhlmann in a new American Constitution Society for Law and Policy (ACS) Issue Brief.

During President Obama’s first term, the administration took some “first steps” toward advancing a sustainability agenda, such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions. But much more must be done during the president’s second term to put the nation on a path to sustainable energy sources, Uhlmann writes in “Toward a Sustainable Future: An Environmental Agenda for the Second Term of the Obama Administration” (available online at www.acslaw.org/publications/issue-briefs/).

The president did, during his second Inaugural Address, signal that climate change would be a priority, saying “We, the people, still believe that our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves, but to all posterity. We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations. Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires and crippling drought and more powerful storms.”

“For better results to occur in the second term, particularly given Republican opposition to climate change legislation, the president will need to make climate change action a top priority,” Uhlmann writes. “The president must engage the public far more than any president has ever done regarding climate change and on the imperative of acting now to prevent catastrophic events.”

Uhlmann provides a list of actions the president could take without action by Congress to mitigate climate change and actions the administration, including the U.S. Department of Justice, could take to bolster the U.S. Clean Air Act and the U.S. Clean Water Act.

The president’s legacy, Uhlmann writes in conclusion, could be one in which he “set America on a course for a sustainable future, recognizing our long-term obligations to mitigate global climate change and developing energy and safe natural gas extraction that will secure our energy independence.”