

Sierra snowpack a ‘Houston, we have a problem’ moment for Obama

Carolyn Lochhead, San Francisco Chronicle, 5-5-14

Satellite photos in February of the Sierra Nevada’s shrunken [snowpack](#) brought home the urgency of climate change to President Obama, according to a [front-page story](#) in Monday’s Washington Post:

“‘It was a ‘Houston, we have a problem’ moment,’ recalled White House counselor John D. Podesta, one of two aides who briefed the president that February day. Obama mentioned the images several times as he warned the governors that political leaders had no choice but to cope with global warming’s impact.”

That was the same month that Obama [visited Fresno](#) to talk drought, making climate change [a key focus of his response](#). (Obama also [played golf the next day](#) on watered fairways in the desert oasis of Rancho Mirage in Riverside County.)

Obama is scheduled to roll out the third [National Climate Assessment](#) on Tuesday, a 1,300-page report compiled by 300 scientists and experts. The report precedes Obama’s expected order in June to cut emissions from existing power plants.

The Post story says Obama sees action on climate change [a big part](#) of his legacy:

“He is regularly briefed on scientific reports on the issue, including a national climate assessment that he will help showcase Tuesday. He is using his executive authority to cut greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and other sources, and is moving ahead with stricter fuel-efficiency standards for the heaviest trucks.

“And while he routinely brings up climate change in closed-door meetings with world leaders, according to his aides, he also discusses it in his private life, talking about global warming’s implications with his teenage daughters.”

Sen. Barbara Boxer, the California Democrat who chairs the Environment and Public Works Committee, is [leading a campaign](#), with White House approval, to raise the profile of climate change this year despite the political risk to incumbent Democratic senators in energy-intensive states. The loss of such seats as Sen. [Mary Landrieu’s](#) in Louisiana could cost Democrats control of the Senate.

The Sierra snowpack provides about a third of California’s water. The latest [readings on May 1](#) showed at just 18 percent of average.