

# NO TALK, SOME WALK: OBAMA ADMINISTRATION RHETORIC ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE FINANCE COMMITMENTS

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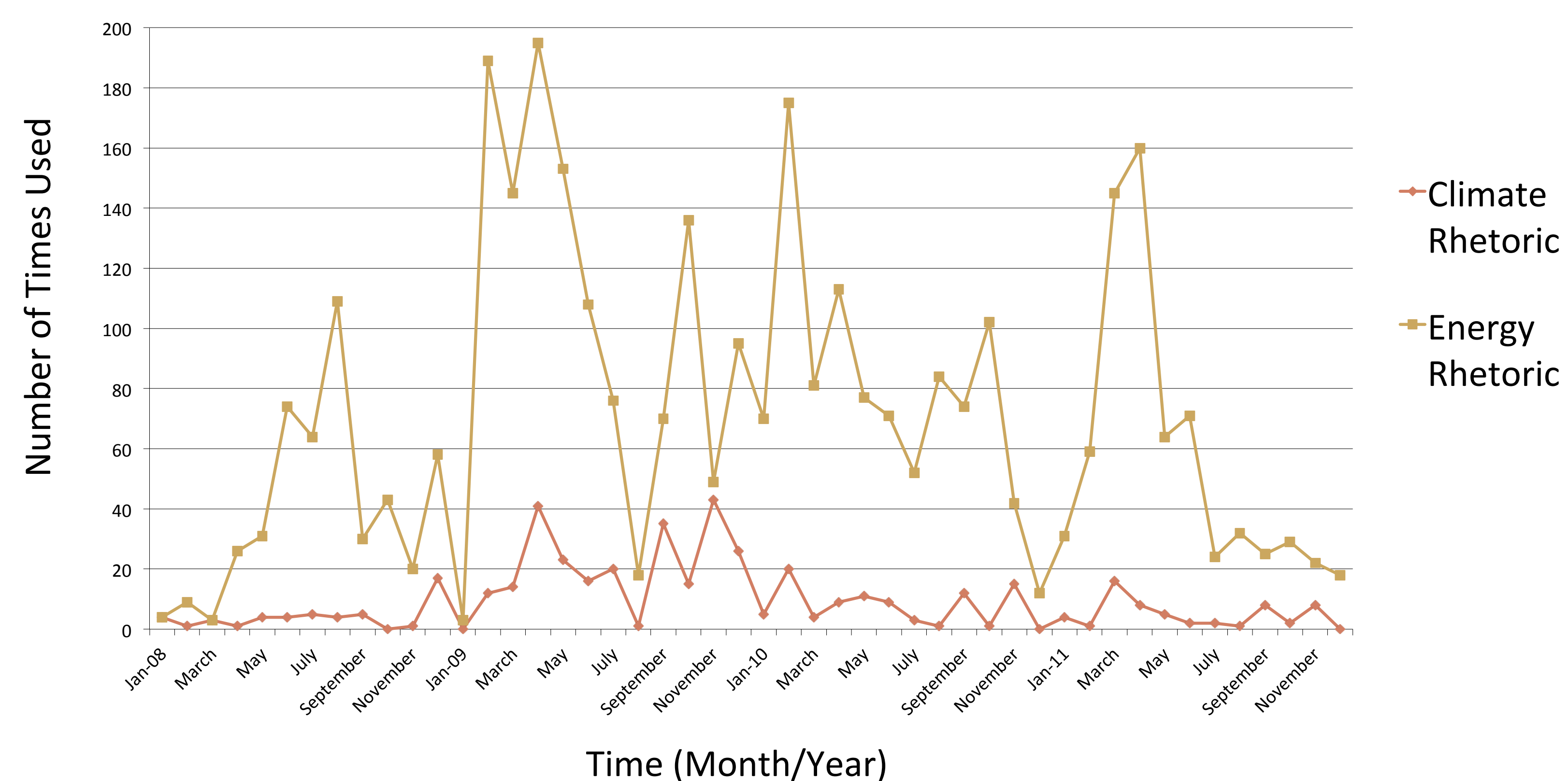
## Introduction

Amidst frequent criticism of US inaction on climate change and obstructionism in United Nations negotiations, little focus has been directed to the substantial increases in US funding to developing countries devoted to helping them reduce their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate destabilization. This project traces the rise and decline of US *international climate funding* since 2009, unearthing the actual numbers and inside story of President Obama's determination to prioritize climate finance despite powerful congressional opposition. The project also traces the rise and decline of the use of the term "climate change" in the administration's public speeches: we examined 1,908 speeches by administration officials over four years (January 2008-December 2011), and find that after an apex at 246 mentions in 2009, the phrase has nearly disappeared in the past two years. The result for climate change policy? No talk, but some walk.

## The Talk: Rhetoric

The administration has noticeably changed its rhetoric: "climate change" and "global warming" have become all but taboo on Capitol Hill, stunningly absent from the political arena. Climate rhetoric saw a brief heyday in 2009, due to the popularity of the President, Democratic control of both Congress and the White House, and the hope for legislative action before the UN climate change negotiations in Copenhagen. Since then, however, the phrase "climate change" is routinely expunged in favor of clean energy diction, which seems more optimistic and bipartisan, and addresses economic concerns.

Obama Administration Rhetoric, 2008-2011



## The Walk: Finance

Amidst significant challenges, Obama has still succeeded in passing a progressive climate change finance policy since 2009. Fiscal Year 2010 was the first budget submitted by the administration, and the increase in international climate finance was dramatic (see table).

**FY10:** Riding its electoral momentum, the administration focused on upholding campaign promises and fulfilling international expectations to uphold COP-15 commitments.

**FY11:** Cap and trade failed, health care was prioritized, and Nov. midterm elections led to Republicans' direct attack on climate change policy.

**FY12:** Complicated by Congress' debt ceiling battle, the budget resulted in across the board cuts. Climate change remains a target.

Global Climate Change Initiative:  
Core Agencies' Budget Authority FY09-12 (in Millions)

Category/ Core Agency	FY2009 Actual	FY2010 Request	FY2010 Actual	FY2011 Request	FY2011 Actual	FY2012 Request	FY2012 Actual
<b>Adaptation</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>255</b>	
Treasury	0	80	55	90	10	40	12.5
State	0	233	60	57	47	49	**
USAID	24	*	123	187	137	166	**
<b>Clean Energy</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>719</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>402.5</b>	<b>652</b>	
Treasury	26	500	326	508	218	457	220.5
State	43	219	96	74	60.5	66	**
USAID	100	*	109	129	124	129	**
<b>Sustainable Landscapes</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>222.8</b>	<b>421</b>	
Treasury	20	56	40	146	68.4	189	58.5
State	10	130	40	25	17	28	**
USAID	98	*	152	175	137.4	213	**
<b>Total Treasury</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>744</b>	<b>296.4</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>291.5</b>
<b>Total State</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>124.5</b>	<b>143</b>	
<b>Total USAID</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>398.4</b>	<b>508</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>1,228</b>	<b>1,001</b>	<b>1,391</b>	<b>819.3</b>	<b>1,328</b>	

\*The FY2010 request aggregated State and USAID funds together; here we have listed them under State and left USAID blank.

\*\*The FY2012 State and USAID final allocations were not explicitly defined in the FY2012 appropriations bill, thus are not yet available. Accordingly the totals have also been left blank.

## Conclusion

In the face of international tension, domestic legislative hostility, and public apathy, Obama has elevated climate finance within the US' political and monetary agenda. His commitment to climate change is evidenced by the elevated budget requests. However, the administration's "stealth strategy" has been too behind-the-scenes: Obama never spent any political capital on the issue, and never fully articulated the profound dangers of climate change. Thus President Obama has demonstrated some walk, but virtually no talk. While notable, this is *not* a recipe for policy success.

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