



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP PHOTO

President Barack Obama, first lady Michelle Obama and Malia and Sasha Obama and Michelle Obama's mother Marian Robinson walk down to the Presidential reviewing stand in front of the White House, Monday, Jan. 21, in Washington. Thousands marched during the 57th Presidential Inauguration parade after the ceremonial swearing-in of President Barack Obama.

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's lofty ideals from his inaugural address ran smack into reality Tuesday, Jan. 22, on the first working day of his second term.

Twenty-four hours after Obama pledged to tackle climate change and called for gays and lesbians to be treated equally under the law, the White House struggled to back up his sweeping rhetoric with specifics, raising questions about how much political muscle he'll put behind both issues. Republicans were already signaling their unhappiness with Obama's agenda.

"The era of liberalism is back," said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell. "If the president pursues that kind of agenda, obviously it's not designed to bring us together."

Obama, standing before hundreds of thousands of people on the National Mall, had vowed to "respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations." But in the White House briefing room a day later, Obama spokesman Jay Carney said he couldn't speculate about future actions. He said that while climate change was a priority for the president, "it is not a singular priority."

On gay rights, the president had declared that the nation's journey is "not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law, for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well."

But Carney said the president was speaking about his personal views and would not take federal action on same-sex marriage, which he continues to see as a state issue.

Even with his last election behind him, Obama has politics to weigh as he considers just how much effort he'll put into pursuing climate change legislation and a gay rights agenda.

Both issues are backed by the president's liberal base but opposed by many Republicans and conservative Democrats. Obama already is asking lawmakers for a lot as he starts his second term. He needs their votes to increase the nation's borrowing limit and approve billions of dollars to keep the government running. And he has pledged to pursue stricter gun legislation and comprehensive immigration reform quickly this year, neither of which can pass Congress without some GOP votes.

For environmental groups and gay rights supporters, Obama's inaugural address provided fresh hope for progress on issues that were stumbling blocks for Obama in his first term.

While the Congress passed legislation backed by Obama to reduce carbon emissions from vehicles, his efforts to pass a cap-and-trade bill failed on Capitol Hill due to bipartisan opposition. And despite Obama's many actions to bolster gay rights in his first term — including repealing the military's ban on openly gay service members — his reluctance to back gay marriage frustrated many of his liberal supporters until he ultimately voiced his support for same-sex unions last year.

Supporters of both issues say Obama will quickly have opportunities to demonstrate his commitment to their causes in his second term.

The Supreme Court will soon take up Proposition 8, a California's ban on same-sex marriage, a case that could give the justices the chance to rule on whether gay Americans have the same

constitutional right to marry as heterosexuals.

Opponents of the ban have called on the Obama administration to file an amicus, or friend-of-the-court, brief to overturn the measure.

"We view the president's filing of an amicus brief in this case as the next natural step to his inaugural remarks," said Fred Sainz, vice president of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest gay rights groups. "His call for equal justice under the law for gay and lesbian Americans including in their committed relationships is the centerpiece of the argument against Proposition 8."

The White House has so far refused to take a position on the Supreme Court case.

For environmental groups, Obama's next best chance to make good on his inaugural address is a looming decision on the Keystone XL pipeline running from Canada to the Gulf Coast.

Obama blocked the pipeline last year, citing uncertainty over the project's route through environmentally sensitive land in Nebraska. But on Tuesday, the state's Republican governor, Dave Heineman, gave his approval to a revised route for the pipeline, a widely anticipated move that nonetheless added to the political pressure for the Obama administration to approve or reject the new route without delay.

"If we are going to get serious about climate change, opening the spigot to a pipeline that will export up to 830,000 barrels of the dirtiest oil on the planet to foreign markets stands as a bad idea," said Anthony Swift of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Republicans and many business groups say the pipeline project would help achieve energy independence.

The State Department, which has federal jurisdiction over the \$7 billion pipeline because it

begins in Canada, said Tuesday that it would not be able to conclude its review during the first quarter of the year.

White House officials sought to look beyond Keystone, with aides saying Tuesday that the president may also pursue executive actions to fulfill his pledge to tackle climate change.

*Associated Press writers Matthew Daly, Josh Lederman and Donna Cassata contributed to this report.*