

Boris Johnson and Joe Biden discuss COVID and climate change

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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaks to U.S. President Joe Biden on the phone. (Photo: Downing Street / Reuters)

London, January 24 (RHC)-- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Saturday he looked forward to working with U.S. President Joe Biden on their shared goals, including tackling climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Johnson used his first phone call with the U.S. president to welcome Biden's announcements that the United States would rejoin the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate and the World Health Organization, and they discussed the prospects of a free trade deal.

"Great to speak to President Joe Biden this evening," Johnson said on Twitter. "I look forward to deepening the longstanding alliance between our two countries as we drive a green and sustainable recovery from COVID-19." The White House said Biden and Johnson talked about cooperation, including through multilateral organisations, on curbing climate change and fighting COVID-19.

Biden also conveyed his intention to "strengthen the special relationship between our countries and revitalize transatlantic ties, underscoring the critical role of NATO to our collective defense and shared values," the White House said in a release.

A spokeswoman for Johnson said the leaders "also discussed the benefits of a potential free trade deal between our two countries". The United Kingdom left the European Union last year, and a new trade agreement between the allies is a higher priority for Johnson than it is for Biden.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday that the administration had no timeline for forging a new trade deal as Biden's attention is largely focused on getting the coronavirus pandemic under control and pressing Congress to pass the president's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan.

Janet Yellen, Biden's treasury secretary nominee, also signalled during her confirmation hearing earlier this week that Biden was not eager to negotiate new trade deals. "President Biden has been clear that he will not sign any new free trade agreements before the US makes major investments in American workers and our infrastructure," Yellen said.

The London-based Sunday Telegraph reported that Johnson was the first leader outside North America to speak to Biden "after his scheduled call was brought forward two days in what will be seen as a major boost for the special relationship between the UK and US."

The leaders additionally "discussed the need for coordination on shared foreign policy priorities, including China, Iran, and Russia," the White House said.

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