

Steven Chu forced out as Obama Energy secretary

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48



Energy Secretary Steven Chu, who oversaw expanded federal support for low-carbon energy and defended it against GOP attacks, announced Friday that he is stepping down.

Chu, in a letter to Energy Department employees, said he would remain with the department at least until the end of February, and perhaps beyond "so that I can leave the Department in the hands of the new Secretary."

"Serving the country as Secretary of Energy, and working alongside such an extraordinary team of people at the Department, has been the greatest privilege of my life. While the job has had many challenges, it has been an exciting time for the Department, the country, and for me personally," he wrote.

While he didn't announce specific plans, Chu said he's like to return to academic life and move back to the West Coast.

"While I will always remain dedicated to the missions of the Department, I informed the President of my decision a few days after the election that Jean and I were eager to return to California. I would like to return to an academic life of teaching and research, but will still work to advance the missions that we have been working on together for the last four years," Chu writes.

President Obama thanked Chu in a statement Friday and said the outgoing secretary "brought to the Energy Department a unique understanding of both the urgent challenge presented by climate change and the tremendous opportunity that clean energy represents for our economy."