

# Why The U.S. Should Stay In The Paris Climate Agreement

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The big news from the United Nations climate meeting that concluded in Marrakech on November 18 is that more than 190 nations, with or without the U.S., are united in their determination to push forward with the Paris Agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions and keep climate warming to well below 2 degrees C. The Paris Agreement came into force on November 4th, long before most observers anticipated as more than the required 55 nations accounting for more than 55 percent of global emissions moved quickly to ratify the historic agreement. By the end of the two-week climate conference in Marrakech, the number of ratifying nations stood at 111, with the U.S. included among them.

Whether or not the U.S. will keep to its commitment and remain in the Paris Agreement is a looming question, which I have written about [elsewhere](#). Here I lay out reasons why the incoming administration should reevaluate its position on the Paris Agreement and choose to stay. As the president-elect and relevant members of his transition team have made statements dismissing the mounting evidence of human-caused climate change, I focus, for now, on arguments for advancing U.S. interests that are distinct from the urgent need to slow and ultimately halt human-caused global climate change.

Contrary to candidate-Trump's assertion that the Paris Agreement "gives foreign bureaucrats control over how much energy we use right here in America," the U.S. and every other party to the agreement has complete control over its own energy use - both the quantity and type. Each party set its own targets, and decided for itself how it would reach its self-determined targets. All are expected to make good faith efforts, but there are no legal sanctions for failing to reach stated targets. Instead, the agreement relies on transparent reporting and review of what nations do and the progress they make as the means by which nations encourage and challenge each other to meet and even exceed their commitments. Each of these elements is

included in the agreement because the U.S. wanted it and negotiated for it, seeking to avoid problems that plagued the Kyoto Protocol and hoping to curry at least some bi-partisan support at home.

Within this structure, the U.S. has little if anything to lose from staying in the Paris Agreement, and much to gain. But we have a great deal to lose if we walk away.

All other parties to the agreement have affirmed that they will act to fulfill their commitments, which will bring a wave of transformative changes and innovations in energy, transportation, manufacturing and other systems. These transformations will squeeze out inefficiencies in energy and other resource use, lower costs for renewable energies and reduce negative health and environmental impacts of economic activity, all while enabling people to attain higher living standards and supporting job growth. We've already seen and benefitted from falling costs of renewable energy in recent years. For example, the global average cost per kWh of solar photovoltaic electricity fell 60 percent over the period 2009 through 2015, from over \$0.30/kWh to \$0.12/kWh, with much lower costs of less than \$0.07/kWh in some places. Paris will help drive these costs down farther as the industry and users gain experience and increase scale.

The U.S. can share in these benefits if we participate in the Paris Agreement. But if we sit on the sidelines, these transformations will happen everywhere - except here - as we continue to rely heavily on dirtier and less efficient energy of a past century. US businesses will lag in competitiveness as we miss out on this wave of innovation that will determine which businesses and economies will lead in the 21st century.

U.S. businesses could find themselves at a disadvantage in foreign markets if other countries take actions to balance the scales of trading with businesses based in countries that do not regulate carbon. Representatives of Canada, our largest trading partner, France and Mexico suggested in Marrakech that some nations might respond to a U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement with carbon pollution taxes on American-made goods. Whether or not they would follow through, and how the World Trade Organization might rule on carbon tariffs or other actions taken against countries that do not regulate carbon, are only speculations at present. But this would

be a significant misstep for an administration that has promised to increase competitiveness and to grow jobs at home.

It is important to note that many businesses support the Paris Agreement, seeing profitable opportunities. More than 365 businesses signed a letter to president-elect Trump calling for the U.S. to reaffirm its commitment to address climate change and implement the Paris Agreement. Among the signatories are Dupont, General Mills, The Hartford, Hewlett Packard, Hilton, Intel, Kellogg Company, Levi Strauss, NIKE, Mars Incorporated, Monsanto and Unilever. Other statements of support for the Paris Agreement have been signed by BNY Mellon, Calpine, Colgate Palmolive, Coca Cola, Johnson & Johnson, Microsoft, Nestle, Pacific Gas & Electric, Rio Tinto, Shell, Sprint and Volvo.

*"We want the US economy to be energy efficient and powered by low-carbon energy. Cost-effective and innovative solutions can help us achieve these objectives. Failure to build a low-carbon economy puts American prosperity at risk. But the right action now will create jobs and boost US competitiveness. We pledge to do our part, in our own operations and beyond, to realize the Paris Agreement's commitment of a global economy that limits global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius."*  
*Letter to Trump, [Business Backs Low Carbon USA](#)*

U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement could cause a diplomatic backlash that would have negative impacts on American foreign policy across a broad range of issues. Todd Stern, former special envoy on climate change, in an interview with [Robinson Meyer of The Atlantic](#) said that withdrawing from the treaty "would be a huge mistake, even forgetting about climate change" and that it would have "radiating bad impacts with respect to U.S. standing" on all other international issues.

China made clear at the Marrakech meeting that it is committed to the Paris Agreement and stands behind its pledges to cut carbon emissions per unit of GDP 60 to 65 percent, get 20 percent of its energy from non-fossil sources, and peak its

emissions, all by 2030. China has also reaffirmed its intention to set up a fund to finance South-South cooperation on climate change. Stanford professor Michael Wara told Meyer "My impression from afar is that President Xi, and China more generally, see this as a strategic issue that they are investing more heavily in. It's not even a matter of investing in climate. It's that policies they are committing to are consistent with overall economic strategy."

Comments by Chinese delegates suggest that China is ready, perhaps eager, to fill any void in international climate policy that might be left by an absent or inactive U.S. An expanded leadership role for China over the next two years would shape the future international climate policy regime in important ways as parties write the rules for implementing the Paris Agreement. Success of the agreement depends on rigorous and transparent rules for reporting and review of parties' actions and performance. This was a priority of the U.S. in negotiating the Paris Agreement, but it was not a priority for China. That is problematic as China is now the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and the quality of China's emission and energy use data may fall short of the needed standard. Will China have a free-hand in writing the Paris Agreement rules, or will the U.S. be present to balance China's influence?

*This post is part of a series produced by The Huffington Post, in conjunction with the U.N.'s 22nd Conference of the Parties(COP22) in Morocco (Nov. 7-18), aka the climate-change conference. The series will put a spotlight on climate-change issues and the conference itself. To view the entire series, visit here.*