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# Climate Change VS. The Trump Administration

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# Climate Change vs. The Trump Administration

Policy Paper – Tessa Bries, December 2019

The science has been clear for decades now. Catastrophic fires, hurricanes, heat and cold waves decimating food and water supplies indicate that change needs to come desperately soon for Earth's environment to survive. While the Paris climate accords have been criticized as not making a drastic enough change, it still represents the newest major agreement and acknowledgement from global leaders that climate change poses a threat to us all; and we are responsible for taking the necessary steps to correct our behavior. However, many scientists looking even further forward say that it is still not enough. Politicians need to double or triple their Paris pledges if there is to be hope of a habitable Earth by the end of the century.

US President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Accords demonstrates that there is still a large portion of humanity that does not believe climate change to be an issue that pertains to them. This is a dangerous mindset for any individual to have, much less the president of the world's second largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Donald Trump's excuse that the accords are too harsh on American businesses is a short-sighted justification for the continued rise in US emissions while other countries take more effective steps towards meeting their Paris goals.

Climate change can no longer be disregarded a myth or environmentalist propaganda; its happening now, and its effects can be seen around the globe. The current rapid rise in GHG emissions have scientists fearing a "hothouse" effect causing mass ocean level rise and potential irrevocable damage to ocean and terrestrial ecosystems that even the 1.5 C limitation, which we are already on the brink of hitting, may not be able to mitigate.<sup>1</sup> There is also growing concern about the effect this will have on marine life and fresh water supplies as polar melting threatens these vital natural resources.<sup>2</sup>

Climate change is a matter that extends beyond parties and politics as it poses a threat to us all. To combat President Trump's myopic approach to climate change, other signatory country leaders need to become ever more devoted to their efforts in finding environmentally efficient solutions to energy supplies and attempt additional efforts to persuade the US President that he must reconsider his actions, especially if re-elected in 2020.

This paper will discuss the details of the Paris Accords, the signatory countries standings in meeting those goals, Donald Trump's campaign promises and actual efforts since his election; and finally, what follow up steps can be taken by the rest of the signatory countries to compensate for the US.

## General info about agreement

On the 12th of December 2015, the members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reached an agreement regarding a new action policy towards global climate change called, the Paris Agreement.<sup>3</sup> This new policy would replace the Kyoto Protocol, an attempt to reduce global carbon emission increases the greenhouse gas effect, for which the commitment period ended in 2012.<sup>4</sup> The Paris Agreement entered effect on November 4, 2016

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<sup>1</sup> Myles Allen, Mustafa Babiker, Yang Chen et. al. "Summary for Policymakers", p.5

<sup>2</sup> idib

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Climate Change, "What is the Paris Agreement?", accessed November 28, 2019

<sup>4</sup> Kyoto 1st Commitment Period (2008–12)," Climate Action - European Commission (European Commission, February 16, 2017)

and as of November 2019, holds 187 ratified signatures of the 197 countries that are participating.<sup>5</sup> Like the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement is centered around reducing global emissions and reducing the rate of global temperature increase by the end of the century. However, the Paris agreement has succeeded in gaining more global participation in the agreement. The Kyoto Protocol was only able to cover about 18 percent of global emissions while after just the first 30 days the Paris Agreement covered an estimated 55 percent of global emissions.<sup>6</sup>

The following paragraph is a more in-depth look at what measures the Paris Agreement will enact and the duties and responsibility of participants as laid out on the United Nations Climate Change website: “What is the Paris Agreement?”.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the agreement is looking to keep the rise in global temperatures below 2 degrees Celsius and also make substantial efforts to limit that increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius maximum by the end of the century (article 2). The agreement is also encouraging countries to reach climate neutrality as quickly as possible, meaning that these countries reach peak levels of greenhouse gas emissions that correlate to the limited reuptake possible from natural carbon sinks such as plants and large bodies of water to limit the levels of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air (article 4). Through the agreement, participating countries must also take measures to protect the natural carbon sinks that they possess and enhance them if able (article 5). They must also work towards the highest possible Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and meet every 5 years to discuss the success of their contributions and set a higher standard for the next 5 years (article 4). Countries must also make adaptation efforts to become less susceptible to climate change (article 7) as well as minimizing the loss and damages that are already being seen through the process of climate change (article 8). More developed countries are required to support less developed countries efforts financially to meet their respective NDC goals (article 9). They must also sanction technological developments (article 10) and building infrastructure that will aid in the efforts of global conservation (article 11). Education and training also need to be invested in to increase global understanding of the dangers of climate change, and the protections that are being put in place to combat it (article 12). The participating parties must also be transparent in their records of actions and finances being taken to meet NDC goals so they can be held accountable (article 13). In 2023, the first “Global stockage” will be held to re-evaluate based on the best available science at that time, what further actions need to be taken and the effect the agreement will have had so far (article 14).

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<sup>5</sup> Paris Agreement - Status of Ratification,” UNFCCC (United Nations Climate Change), accessed November 28, 2019,

<sup>6</sup> *idib*

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Climate Change, What is the Paris Agreement?, par. 6-18

## The Reality of the Paris Agreement

As of 2019, many countries that have ratified and attempted to meet their NDC goals set through the Paris Agreement have admitted that they have failed to meet those goals. Major emitters such as the USA, China and Russia among many others have not even come close to meeting their agreed upon emissions levels.<sup>8</sup> There are only two countries that ratified the Paris agreement that are actually on track to meeting the 1.5 degree Celsius target: Morocco and The Gambia.<sup>9</sup> While it was agreed that developing countries would not be held accountable for failing to meet their emissions goals, most of the developed countries in the EU and around the world have failed to meet their NDC goals as well.

Despite politician's excuses and promises to do more in the future, scientists believe that not enough is being done now. A report published by the Universal Ecological Fund elaborates on the findings of a group of scientists who have determined that most of the countries that have signed on to the Paris agreement are not even close to being on track to meeting their goals, and some of the goals set by those participating countries are not high enough to evade a crisis either.<sup>10</sup> The Paris Agreement's goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is thought to be a very ambitious. Through their studies, these scientists were able to find that nearly 75 percent of the climate change pledges made by individual countries are partially, or totally insufficient toward the goal of reducing total greenhouse gases (GHG) by 2030 as is the goal of the Paris agreement.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, because the pledges made are voluntary, countries are able to exploit loopholes to avoid official global policy being passed that would force them to act and meet their promises.<sup>12</sup> These countries being able to avoid taking effective action will only cause more long term harm to the environment because they are not being held responsible for their actions and, are able to explain their failures away as being outside of their control.

While all countries need to make a greater effort to lower their emission, the large emitters hold more of a responsibility to reducing global climate change than smaller developing countries. The four largest emitters of GHG are China, the USA, EU (28), and India and make up 56 percent of all emissions.<sup>13</sup> China has pledged to reduce its emissions by 60-65 percent by 2030 however current research has shown that their emissions have increased 80 percent from 2005 to 2018 and they are expected to continue to increase.<sup>14</sup> Some of China's increase can be accounted for by their industrialization and large population, though they are still emitting 26.8 percent which is more than 10 percent higher than the next largest emitter (the US) at 13.1 percent.<sup>15</sup> Their emissions are expected to continue to rise which is supported by further research from the Global Carbon Project that has found, despite the pledges made in 2015, that global carbon emissions increased by 1.7 percent in 2017 and another 2.7 percent in 2018 as can be seen in figure 1.<sup>16</sup> The continuing rise in global emissions demonstrates the lack of genuine effort despite public statements being made by participating countries.

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<sup>8</sup> Climate Action Tracker (CAT), Countries, accessed November 2019

<sup>9</sup> idib

<sup>10</sup> Watson, McCarthy, Canziani, Nakicenovic, Hisas, "The Truth Behind the Climate Pledges", p. ii

<sup>11</sup> idib

<sup>12</sup> idib

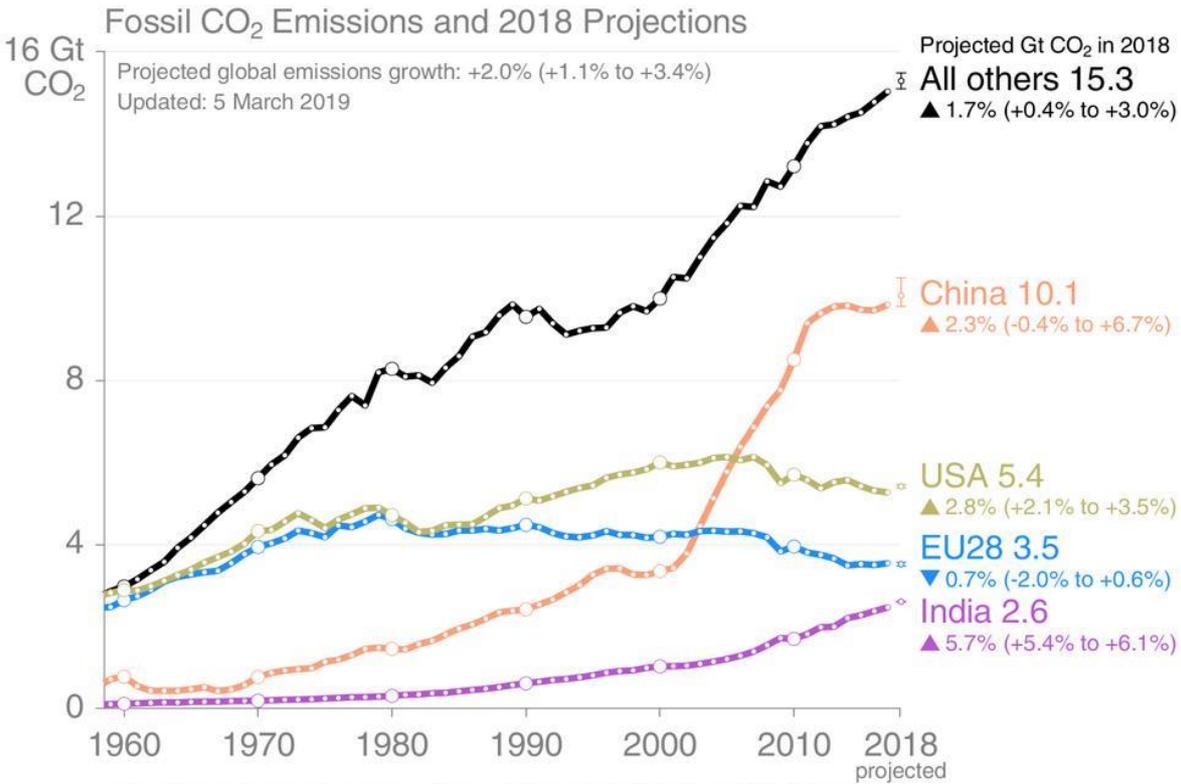
<sup>13</sup> idib

<sup>14</sup> idib

<sup>15</sup> idib

<sup>16</sup> Mulvaney, "World Climate Change Report Card", National Geographic, September 2019

**Figure 1:** Fossil CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions and 2018 Projections



**Source:** Climate Change, "Have Chinese CO<sub>2</sub> emissions really peaked?", March 31, 2017).

The Paris Agreements have also not addressed problems with large emitters who have refused to make a meaningful pledge toward reducing emissions, or that are backing out of the agreement altogether. Russia is another major emitter and finally ratified the Paris Agreement just under 4 years after it had been finalized on September 23, 2019. While Russia is on track to meet their pledge, it is merely because their commitment actually allows them to pollute more than they are currently. Russia’s pledge claims that they will reduce their carbon emissions 20 to 30 percent below 1990 levels, however they are already polluting at 32 percent below those carbon levels.<sup>17</sup> This means that they will still meet their agreement even if they were to increase their emissions by 2 percent between now and 2030.<sup>18</sup>

**Critically Insufficient USA**

The current US administration also poses a threat to climate goals. When the Paris agreements were first proposed in 2015, US President Barack Obama immediately after with the main pledge to cut US carbon emissions by 26 to 28 percent by 2025.<sup>19</sup> However, while this pledge was supported by a 2/3rds majority of the American public,<sup>20</sup> it was never officially ratified by congress which has left it vulnerable to the new Trump administration.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Luhn, “Russia ratifies Paris climate Accord”, par. 5, accessed November, 2019

<sup>18</sup> idib

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Harrington, “Here's what the US actually agreed to in the Paris climate deal”, Business Insider, June 1, 2017

<sup>20</sup>Oliver Milman, “Americans are Waking up”, The Guardian, September 15, 2019

<sup>21</sup> Harrington, “Here's what the US actually agreed to”, Business Insider, June 1, 2017

On June 1, 2017, the Trump administration announced its intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement that President Obama signed in 2015.<sup>22</sup> November 4, 2019, it announced that it had officially begun proceedings and the US would officially be out of the Paris Agreement the same date that following year, 2020.<sup>23</sup> This was seen as another disappointment to world leaders who have been working to improve US relations and their own country's climate impact. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, France's President Emmanuel Macron, and Italy's Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, among many other leaders reached out to Trump after his June 2017 announcement and expressed their great disappointment with his decision and affirmed that their own countries would continue to work towards their own Paris goals.<sup>24</sup> In the official press release given by the US Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo, he said that the US was backing out of the Paris deal because the agreement placed too high of an economic burden on US businesses, workers, and taxpayers. He also stated that the US had already seen a drop in emissions as well as growth in the economy without the agreement.<sup>25</sup> President Trump also spoke during his initial 2017 announcement of the withdrawal that he would be open to reentering the US into the Paris agreement if the terms of the agreement could be renegotiated.<sup>26</sup> This was met with absolute refusal from the other members of the Paris agreement, who claimed that participants may lose the motivation and momentum created around the 2015 agreement if countries were regularly allowed to renegotiate their responsibilities as they saw fit.<sup>27</sup>

Currently the US is listed as “Critically Insufficient” on Climate Action Tracker in regard to meeting the goals of the Paris agreement.<sup>28</sup> This is due in part to the US having withdrawn from the Paris agreements, but also due to the fact that their emissions levels actually rose 2.7 percent in 2018 (Figure 2).<sup>29</sup> The Rhodium Group, a US climate service, found there to have been an increase in all methods of US greenhouse gas emissions in 2018 (Figure 3) as exemplified in the graphs below.

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<sup>22</sup> Michael R. Pompeo, “On the US Withdrawal”, US Department of State, November 4, 2019

<sup>23</sup> idib

<sup>24</sup> Johnathan Watts, Kate Connolly, “World leaders react after Trump rejects Paris climate deal”, The Guardian, June 2, 2017

<sup>25</sup> Pompeo, “On the US Withdrawal”, US Department of State, 2019

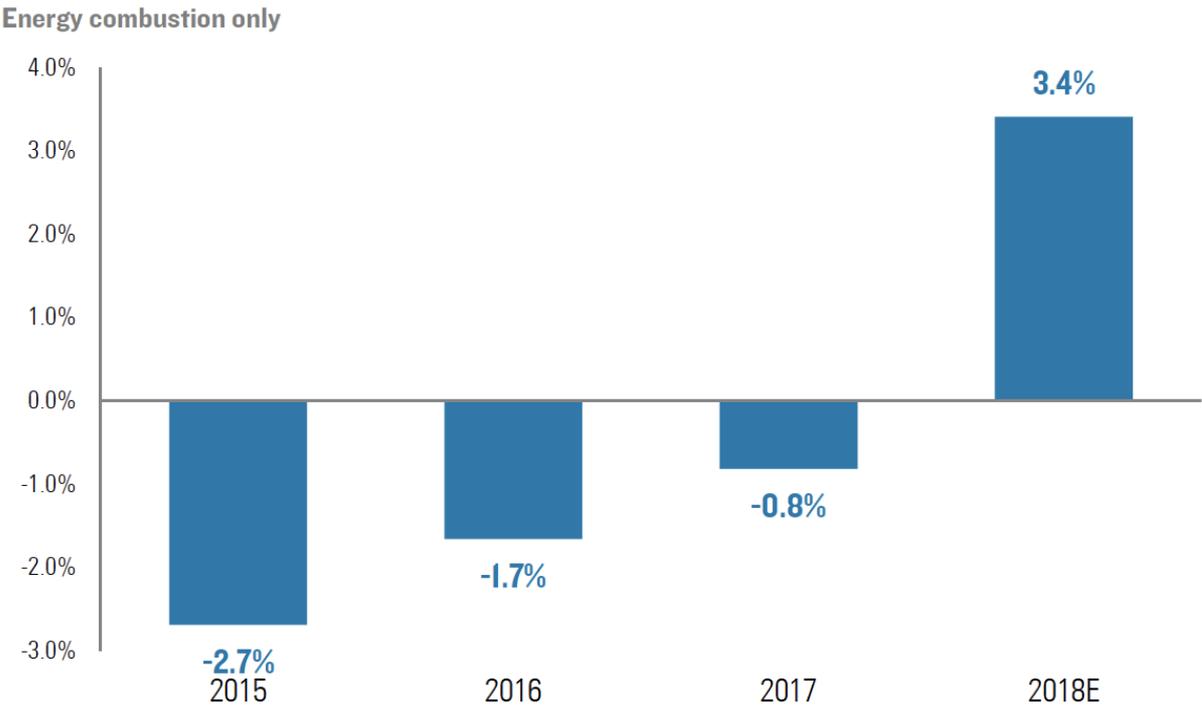
<sup>26</sup> Carbon Brief Staff, “Global reaction: Trump pulls US out of Paris Agreement on climate change”, Carbon Brief June 6, 2017

<sup>27</sup> idib

<sup>28</sup> Climate Action Tracker, “Countries”, Updated September 2019, Accessed November 2019

<sup>29</sup> Houser, Pitt, and Hess, “Final US Emissions Estimates for 2018”, pg. 1

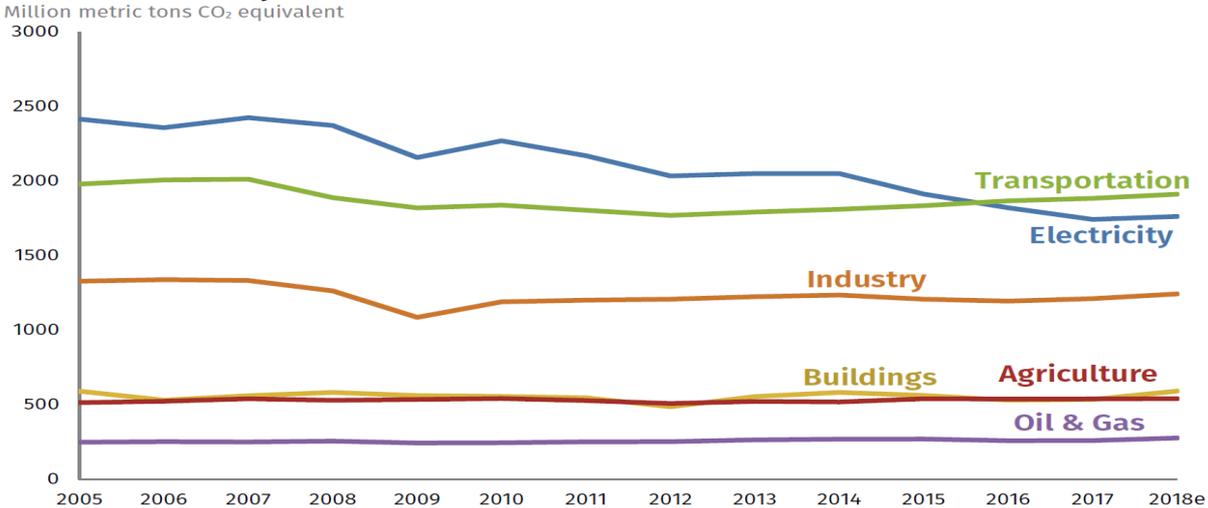
**Figure 2: Annual change in US CO<sub>2</sub> emissions**



(The 3.4 percent increase shown for 2018 was an estimate made based on preliminary data, the final estimate is a 2.7 percent increase as started in the article)

**Source:** "Preliminary IS Emissions for 2018." Rhodium Group, Rhodium Group, LLC, January 8, 2019

**Figure 3: US GHG emissions by sector**



**Source:** Houser, Pitt, and Hess, "Final Us Emissions for 2018", Rhodium US Climate Service, p.4.

## Trump's campaign promises

One of President Trump's campaign promises before his 2016 election was that he was going to remove the US from the Paris Accords. His continuous rhetoric, "America First", was the rationale behind this move that received criticism from around the world. Trump claimed that the promises his predecessor, Barack Obama, signed at the finalization of the 2015 accords were forcing too many limitations of US businesses and that the US was taking an unfair burden compared to the other signatory countries.<sup>30</sup> On November 4, 2019 President Trump announced that he was making good on his campaign promise and withdrawing from the Paris agreements. After the announcement many large American businesses, celebrities, scientists and even members of his staff pleaded with him not to make this decision; they emphasized that the changes proposed by the Paris agreements were necessary and they would be willing to make them for a better future with clean energy.<sup>31</sup>

During his campaign, the now president was praised by his constituency for standing up against climate change. He drew attention by calling climate change a "hoax" and his supporters believed his claims that the democrats were using climate change policies to destroy the economy.<sup>32</sup> While that may have only been a few years back, the American public's attitude towards climate change has shifted. Now, 69 percent of Americans not only believe in climate change, but that the US should be a part of an international effort to stop its damaging effects on the environment.<sup>33</sup> Now that a large majority of American believe in the effects of climate change it is predicted to be one of the most debated subjects in the 2020 presidential election.<sup>34</sup> As more reports and polls are performed with these same findings, President Trump will have much to answer for from all political parties. His initial campaign promised to withdraw from the Paris accords, which he has now succeeded in, but it also made many other environmental promises that have come into effect as well.

Another of President Trump's campaign promises was to reduce strict regulations that lead to a reduction of jobs for Americans. One of the ways he has attempted to do this is through reinvigorating the coal industry by allowing lower restrictions to pass surrounding the levels of emissions that they can produce, as well as lowering the criminal prosecution that they would face as well.<sup>35</sup> By allowing this to pass and aided by the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) refusal to enforce environmental protection legislation, President Trump is fulfilling his campaign promises to keep more jobs in America. The coal industry has been dying for years due to a shift in funding clean energies, but President Trump continues to support it in an effort to keep more jobs on American soil. He has also rolled back regulations implemented by the Obama administration regarding oil drilling and pipelines both on land and in the sea.<sup>36</sup> The Trump administration sees these efforts as increasing the number of jobs for American workers while environmentalists and scientists see these rollbacks as critical set

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<sup>30</sup> Pompeo, "On the US Withdrawal", US Department of State, November 4, 2019,

<sup>31</sup> Myron Ebell, "Trump Administration Begins Withdrawal from Paris Climate Treaty", Competitive Enterprise Institute, November 8, 2018

<sup>32</sup> Justin Worland, "Trump's Paris Agreement Move Is Unpopular. Here's How He's Trying to Spin It", Time, November 5, 2019

<sup>33</sup> Yale University, "Most Registered Voters Say the US Should Participate in the Paris Agreement", Climate Change communication

<sup>34</sup> Justin Worland, "How Climate Change in Iowa is Changing U.S. Politics", Time, September 12, 2019

<sup>35</sup> Michael Greshko, Laura Parker, Brian Clark, et. al., "A running list of how President Trump is changing environmental policy", Last update May 3, 2019, accessed November 29, 2019

<sup>36</sup> idib

setbacks for climate change movements in the US. The reduction in restriction placed on business regarding their energy use will only increase the amount of fossil fuels being used.

In the official statement given by the US Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo, the US backed out of the Paris Agreement because it was placing too heavy a burden of US business that was hindering job growth and sustainability. He also spoke about how the US had already reduced its carbon emissions by 13 percent from 2005 to 2017 and they will continue to do so as the US finds more efficient solutions to emission problems.<sup>37</sup> This statement does not however address that, despite the efforts that the US is making toward for environmentally efficient solutions, it remains the second highest GHG emitter in the world. His statement also directly contradicts the findings of multiple independent science and research groups that have found that US GHG emissions have increased 2.7 percent in 2018 as discussed above.<sup>38</sup> The Trump administration of rolling back government regulations surrounding energy use for American business has been fulfilled, though they have not implemented a new clean energy source to replace the coal power plants that in 2018 made up 27.5 percent of the US' energy supply; fossil fuels as a whole still make up 63.6 percent of American electricity production.<sup>39</sup>

President Trump has changed his rhetoric surrounding climate change since his campaign first began. During the 2016 presidential election race, there were not many questions involving environmental policy, though Trump was known for his passionate views about climate change being a hoax made up by the democrats in order to justify destroying the economy. His use of the term “hoax” continued throughout his candidacy and shortly into his presidency. However, once elected this stopped for the most part as even his officials could no longer support the idea that. Trump now claims that there is worsening pollution and emissions in the world as a whole but does not acknowledge the US' part in contributing to them, instead blaming other top emitters such as China and Russia.<sup>40</sup>

## Follow up steps

While the Trump administration claims to be making America greener and that they are “leagues ahead of other countries” in energy efficient measures, scientists have proven this to not be the case. While this administration is in power, it is unlikely that real changes will take place and other signatory countries must take use the US' refusal to take part in the Paris agreement as motivation to find better environmental solutions faster.

The American public has made it clear that they believe climate change is a growing issue and more needs to be done about it. President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris agreement has made US relations with the rest of the world even more unstable as world leaders are now led to wonder if he can be trusted. President Obama signed this agreement with the intent of following through for the American public. The Trump administration's withdrawal from this promise has now frustrated and disappointed much of the American public. Despite their initial support, republican parties have now turned to question why he was unwilling to accept the challenge to protect their future. In the wake of President Trump's decision to not work with the rest of the signatory countries to lower emissions and find effective solutions together, some US individual states and cities have attempted to continue with the pledge on their own. After President Trump's announcement that he would be removing the US from the Paris agreements, many US city mayors and governors announced that they would continue the

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<sup>37</sup> Pompeo, “On the US Withdrawal”, US Department of State, November 4, 2019,

<sup>38</sup> Houser, et. al. “Final US Emissions Estimates for 2018”, pg. 1

<sup>39</sup> US Energy Information Administration, US electricity production by source, October 25, 2019

<sup>40</sup> BBC News, Trump, Climate change goes both ways, June 5, 2019

pledge in their cities, such as California and Washington D.C., regardless of the federal policy.<sup>41</sup> As a June 2018, there were governors from 16 states and Puerto Rico, accounting for almost 40 percent of the US agreed to take the climate pledge and keep working towards the Paris agreements goals.<sup>42</sup> US foundations are also providing financial aid to cities in the US who are looking to continue on with the Paris agreement.<sup>43</sup> These cities and states have taken effective measures such as investing in greater renewable energy resources and California's push for getting more electric cars and heavy push back against government regulation reducing limitations on car emissions.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of the federal action that has been taken, the American people believe it is time to take charge of the climate crisis and are finding ways to invest in them on their own.

By pulling out of the Paris agreements, President Trump will have a difficult time convincing voters this upcoming election that he cares about climate issues. This will be heightened due his being undermined by many individual US states and cities that have continued with their Paris Agreement plan despite the president's withdrawal. President Trump stated throughout his campaign that he believed global warming and climate change to be a hoax that is being blown out of proportion. He has backed track on some of these statements but that message will still ring through the ears of American voters in November 2020.

The youth vote is also thought to be one of the most important forces this coming election. As the younger generation (the Millennials and Gen Z) are known for their resolve surrounding climate change and their dissatisfaction with the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris agreements their votes are going to be more important than ever as climate change issues take hold of the 2020 election. The problem surrounding the youth vote in 2020 however will be the same problem that happened in 2016. Not all of these young people are registering to vote. It was estimated that in 2016 only 49 percent of millennials actually voted in the Presidential election (19 percent of the electorate); that is only about half of the boomer generation who made up 38 percent of the electorate.<sup>45</sup> Now however, with a new sense of urgency, weekly climate change protests, and scientists threatening global destruction that may finally be enough to get the youth more involved in US politics. For the climate crisis to be averted, every country needs to be held responsible for reducing their impact on the environment; especially the second largest emitter in the world.

Other signatory countries can look at these efforts made by the American people as hope that the US may reenter the Paris agreement after the 2020 election, or that at least there is motivation behind the American people to take action against climate change. Until such time as there is federal backing to the states and cities individual efforts, the other members of the Paris agreement need to look at the US as further catalyst towards making advancements in their own efforts toward clean energy. The Bloomberg foundation in the US developed a program to fund 20 "leadership cities" in the US to help them meet their Paris agreement goals.<sup>46</sup> This is something that foreign foundations could consider doing for the US to help them lower their emissions. However, the most important step that the of their member

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<sup>41</sup> Sarah Holder, "One Year After Trump Left the Paris Agreement, Who's Still In?", CityLab, June, 1, 2018

<sup>42</sup> idib

<sup>43</sup> idib

<sup>44</sup> idib

<sup>45</sup> Asma Khalid, "Millennials Now Rival Boomers As A Political Force, But Will They Actually Vote?", NPR, May 16, 2016

<sup>46</sup> Holder, "One Year After Trump Left the Paris Agreement, Who's Still In?", CityLab, June, 1, 2018

countries of the agreement can take is to increase their own standards. The Paris Agreement has already been criticized by scientists for not taking drastic enough measures to curb climate change; now that the US will no longer be a part of the agreement, there is even less of a chance of the agreement meeting its goals.<sup>47</sup> The US is still the second largest emitter in the world and their emissions rose in 2018 which will also make it more difficult for the agreement to make its goals.

At the end of the day, with the US backing out of the agreement, it is up to the other signatory countries to take up the slack. Investing in renewable energy sources such as windmills, hydro plants, and solar panel technology is far more advanced and capable of producing more energy than ever before. Other technologies such as electric cars have been developed and are finally accessible for the general public. It is up to the governing bodies of these countries to invest in the infrastructure that will support these clean alternatives and make the Paris agreement goals, a reality.

The Paris agreement represents the initiative towards major action towards climate change. Scientists have been warning politicians about the ramifications for decades and for the first time, humanity has the tools that we need to make an actual change towards fully renewable energy. The effects of climate change can be seen around the US such as more frequent flooding, wildfire, and extreme temperatures where there previously has not. While the US' backing out of the Paris agreement is a setback towards the ultimate goal of net emissions reaching 0 emissions, it should not be looked at as a condemnation to failure, but rather as an incentive for other countries to take the lead for a cleaner future.



## TESSA BRIES

### Intern

Tessa Bries is an American undergraduate student studying business and marketing in the Czech Republic.

She is the founder of the business club at the Anglo-American University where students meet regularly to discuss business fundamentals and current trends.

After graduation, she plans to continue her studies in marketing in Europe

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<sup>47</sup> Watson, et.al., “The Truth Behind the Climate Pledges”, p. ii

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