

“MAKE OUR PLANET GREAT AGAIN”¹

INTRODUCTION

President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw the United States from the global agreement to mitigate the effects of global warming puts the United States in a unique position. Now, as a result of President Trump’s decision to discontinue climate change initiatives, cities and states are defying the federal government by adopting their own measures. Further, since the United States is seen as a leader in climate change, by decreasing its participation, other parties to the Paris Agreement may question the United States’ commitment to the very important issue of climate change. Section I of this Article begins by providing a brief background on the Paris Agreement. Section II then explains the downfalls of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. Finally, Section III gives a description of legislation currently proposed by a number of democratic senators.

I. THE PARIS AGREEMENT

In an effort to work towards a sustainable low carbon future, the Paris Agreement (the Agreement) sets out a global action plan to combat climate change by aiming to keep “global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius.”² The Agreement is voluntary, and as such is politically encouraged versus legally bound.³ The United States entered the Agreement under the Obama Administration on April 22, 2016, and ratification was accepted on September 3, 2016.⁴

While taking steps to achieve the above-mentioned goal, the Agreement encourages “[d]eveloped countries [] [to] take the lead by undertaking absolute economy-wide [greenhouse gas] reduction targets, while developing countries should continue enhancing their mitigation efforts, and are encouraged to move toward economy-wide targets over time.”⁵ As the second highest emitter of total greenhouse gases,⁶ and one of the most influential countries in the world,⁷ the United States is in a position to take a leading role in efforts to combat the effects of climate change. As such,

1. Quote by French President, Emmanuel Macron.

2. United Nations, Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Summary of the Paris Agreement*, (last visited June 6, 2017) <http://bigpicture.unfccc.int/#content-the-paris-agreement>.

3. Olga Bonfiglio, *The politics behind the Paris agreement on climate change*, WEST. MICH. U. (last visited June 6, 2017), <https://wmich.edu/arts-sciences/news-earthday-keele-climate-change>.

4. European Commission, *Paris Agreement*, EUR. COMMISSION (last updated June 6, 2017), http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/paris_en.

5. United Nations, *supra* note 2.

6. Thomas Damassa, Johannes Friedrich & Mengpin Ge, *6 Graphs Explain the World’s Top 10 Emitters*, WORLD RESOURCES INS. (Nov. 25, 2014), <http://www.wri.org/blog/2014/11/6-graphs-explain-world%E2%80%99s-top-10-emitters>.

7. US News, *These are the World’s Most Influential Countries*, US NEWS (Mar. 7, 2017) <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/best-international-influence>.

and although withdrawal from the Agreement could take up to four years,⁸ President Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Agreement sends a negative message to the international community about the United States' commitment to addressing global warming.

II. DOWNFALLS OF WITHDRAWING FROM THE PARIS AGREEMENT

Not only does withdrawing from the Paris Agreement serve as a large setback to combating effects of global warming domestically and internationally, it may also "provoke sharp backlash from the rest of the world."⁹ The Obama Administration made a promise to "cut greenhouse gas emission 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025 as part of the Paris deal . . . [but a] recent analysis . . . estimated that, under Mr. Trump's policies, United States emission will now most likely fall just 15 to 19 percent below 2005 levels by 2025."¹⁰

As mentioned above, as the U.S. is the second largest emitter of greenhouse gases,¹¹ withdrawal sends the message that the United States—the world's largest economy—does not care to play a role in the international mission to work together to mitigate the incredibly harmful effects of climate change.¹² Large powers such as Europe and China have vowed to continue efforts to mitigate global warming, but it's possible other countries will be averse to taking on the extra costs resulting from Mr. Trump's decision.¹³ For example, as part of the Agreement the United States was to supply three billion dollars to help poorer countries combat the effects of global warming.¹⁴ Although President Obama contributed about a third of that three billion dollar promise during his presidency, Donald Trump has "vowed to cancel all future payments."¹⁵ Other countries will either have to pick up the excess two billion dollars, or the poorer countries will lose the aid promised under the Agreement by the United States – leaving them with significantly decreased resources to mitigate the global climate change crisis.

Looking to a more positive note, in the midst of the disastrous policy decision on the part of the Trump Administration, "Hawaii[,] on Tuesday [June 6, 2017] became the first state to pass a law committing to the goals

8. Robinson Meyer, *The Problem With Abandoning the Paris Agreement*, THE ATLANTIC (Nov. 18, 2016), <http://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/11/the-problem-with-abandoning-the-paris-agreement/508085/>.

9. Brad Plumer, *What to Expect as U.S. Leaves Paris Climate Accord*, N.Y. TIMES, (June 1, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/climate/us-paris-accord-what-happens-next.html?ribbon-ad-idx=3&rref=climate&module=Ribbon&version=origin®ion=Header&action=click&contentCollection=Climate&pgtype=article>.

10. *Id.*

11. Damassa, *supra* note 6.

12. Plumer, *supra* note 9.

13. *Id.*

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

and limits of the Paris accord.”¹⁶ Also a part of the U.S. Climate Alliance, Hawaii and multiple other states have since vowed to uphold the Agreement despite the withdrawal from the federal government.¹⁷ Moreover, as of June 5, 2017 “more than 175 mayors [this number growing every day], representing 51 million people, have committed to honor the Paris agreement’s goals.”¹⁸ Collectively, cities, states, and corporations can do their part to mitigate the effects of climate change by “negotiating contracts with local utilities to supply greater amounts of renewable energy, to build rapid transit programs . . . [and to take] measures like buying renewable energy for [] offices and factories, or making sure [] supply chains are climate-friendly.”¹⁹

III. 100 BY ’50 LEGISLATION

Given the increasing emphasis and role renewable energy will play in the near future, Senators Bernie Sanders, Jeff Merkley, Edward J. Markey, and Corey Booker teamed up to introduce the “100 by ’50 Act.”²⁰ Although it is sure to be an uphill battle, this Act consists of seven key components and “lays out a roadmap for a transition to 100% clean and renewable energy by 2050 [and] is the first bill introduced in Congress that will fully envision a transition off of fossil fuels for the United States.”²¹ The bill strives to accomplish: a “mandatory fossil fuel phase-out” which will take place while simultaneously increasing investments in renewable energy and infrastructure;²² the use of a zero-emissions standard and an increase in the amount of money put into zero-emission vehicles and heating systems; providing grants to guarantee low-income communities reap the same benefits of the bill;²³ making sure individuals currently employed in the fossil fuel economy receive jobs;²⁴ a halt in the authorization of fossil fuel projects, such as the Keystone XL pipeline;²⁵ ensuring “energy-intensive U.S. products maintain a level playing field with products im-

16. Jonah Engel Bromwich, *Defying Trump, Hawaii Becomes First State to Pass Law Committing to Paris Accord*, N.Y. TIMES (June 7, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/07/climate/hawaii-climate-paris-trump.html>.

17. *Id.*

18. Mark Hand, *D.C. joins more than 175 other cities in pledging to uphold Paris agreement goals*, THINK PROGRESS (June 5, 2017), <https://thinkprogress.org/dc-mayor-commits-to-paris-accord-7a3e3ce30d54>.

19. Hiroko Tabuchi & Henry Fountain, *Bucking Trump, These Cities, States and Companies Commit to Paris Accord*, N.Y. TIMES (June 1, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/climate/american-cities-climate-standards.html>.

20. Jeff Merkley, *Merkley, Sanders, Markey, Booker Introduce Landmark Legislation to Transition United States to 100% Clean and Renewable Energy*, JEFF MERKELY (Apr. 27, 2017), <https://www.merkley.senate.gov/news/press-releases/merkley-sanders-markey-booker-introduce-landmark-legislation-to-transition-united-states-to-100-clean-and-renewable-energy>.

21. *Id.*

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.*

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

ported from other countries by imposing a carbon tariff for imported carbon-intensive products;²⁶ an invest in Climate Bonds and "100 by '50" created programs to obtain a new source of funding which, leads to a smooth transition.²⁷

IV. CONCLUSION

As it becomes increasingly clear the American people cannot rely on the federal government to enforce policies and make decisions to help combat the harmful effects of climate change, it is imperative that cities, companies, states, and individuals recognize and make decisions with the environment in mind.

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26. *Id.*

27. *Id.*

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