

It's official: Trump begins process to exit Paris climate agreement

US decision kicks off year-long process that will end one day after the next presidential election.

Jeff Tollefson



US President Donald Trump has said that remaining in the Paris climate agreement would hurt the country economically. Credit: Mark Wilson/Getty

US secretary of state Michael Pompeo submitted the paperwork on 4 November to officially withdraw the United States from the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

The move came as little surprise: President Donald Trump had said he [intended to pull the country out of the agreement](#) in June 2017, arguing that remaining in the global pact would harm the United States' economic competitiveness. In announcing the decision on 4 November, Pompeo said that US greenhouse gas emissions had declined by 13% between 2005 and 2017, even as the economy grew 19%.

But the move to withdraw from the Paris agreement [drew criticism from scientists and](#)

[environmentalists](#). “President Trump’s decision to walk away from the Paris Agreement is irresponsible and shortsighted,” said Alden Meyer, director of strategy and policy at the advocacy group the Union of Concerned Scientists in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in a statement.

Under the rules of the climate agreement, 4 November 2019 was the earliest a country could notify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of its intent to withdraw from the pact, three years after it [entered into force](#) in 2016. The actual withdrawal will not take effect for another year, so the United States would formally exit the agreement on 4 November 2020 — one day after the presidential election that will determine whether Trump gets a second four-year term as president.

An uncertain future

Withdrawing from the Paris climate agreement will cost the United States in terms of political and economic influence, as other nations push forward to develop a low-carbon economy, says Andrew Light, who worked on the global pact at the US State Department under former President Barack Obama. But that could change if Trump isn't re-elected.

The Democratic presidential candidates are taking climate change seriously, and if one of them wins the 2020 election, they could direct the United States back into the agreement once they take office in January 2021. Countries that leave the Paris agreement can rejoin the pact 30 days after notifying the UNFCCC of their intentions, according to the World Resources Institute (WRI), an environmental think tank in Washington DC.

“The US will be under the gun to move as quickly as possible,” says Light, who is now a senior fellow at the WRI. If Trump prevails, it will be up to US cities, states and businesses to maintain leadership on climate-change issues, he says.

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President Donald Trump is moving forward with his plan to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate pact. GAGE SKIDMORE/FICKR ([CC BY-SA 2.0](#))

U.S. moves closer to withdrawing from Paris climate pact

By [Jean Chemnick, E&E News](#), [Nick Sobczyk, E&E News](#) Nov. 4, 2019 , 3:15 PM

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The United States will start the process of formally withdrawing from the Paris Agreement this afternoon, walking away from a deal that took more than two decades to make and that virtually every other nation on Earth still supports.

The withdrawal letter will travel from the State Department to the United Nations. That will start the clock ticking on a one-year waiting period that ends with the United States exiting the deal on 4 November 2020—1 day after Americans head to the polls to choose a president.

Today's move has been expected ever since President Donald Trump stood in the White House Rose Garden on 1 June 2017,

and blasted the global climate pact as a bad trade deal for the United States.

Bowing to global pressure to remain in the deal, he said, would have restricted the U.S. economy and resource development and given foreign competitors a leg up.

"The Paris accord would undermine our economy, hamstring our workers, weaken our sovereignty, impose unacceptable legal risks and put us at a permanent disadvantage to the other countries of the world," Trump said.

His words were decried by governments around the world, which criticized the United States for withdrawing and rejected Trump's suggestion that he might try to renegotiate the pact.

Nations including Syria, North Korea and Russia are now members of the Paris Agreement, which relies heavily on voluntary national commitments to meet its goals of maintaining a safe level of warming.

Andrew Light, a senior fellow at the World Resources Institute in Washington, D.C., said in a recent interview that the case for staying in Paris has only strengthened since Trump announced plans to withdraw.

"We know a lot more now than we did on June 1, 2017," he said.

Polls continue to show a growing gulf between Trump administration climate policies and U.S. public opinion ([*Climatewire*](#), 13 September).

Wildfires underway in California and events such as 2017's catastrophic hurricane season have helped make climate change a front-of-mind issue for U.S. voters, in contrast to past years.

While a significant share of GOP voters say they support Paris, Republicans in the House of Representatives floated a

resolution Friday backing Trump's withdrawal. It was supported by conservative organizations such as Americans for Tax Reform and FreedomWorks.

The **resolution**, introduced by Representatives Jodey Arrington (R-Texas), Chip Roy (R-Texas) and Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.), among others, is purely messaging that won't pass the Democratic House.

The chamber voted earlier this year to rejoin the agreement via H.R. 9, the "Climate Action Now Act," and staying in Paris is one of the few climate policies that virtually every congressional Democrat can agree on.

But it's nonetheless a signal of support from backers of the fossil fuel industry and some of President Trump's biggest fans in Washington, D.C.

"The Paris Agreement prioritized international virtue signaling over the concerns of American families, seeking to hobble the American economy with unnecessary regulations and higher energy costs," Tom Pyle, president of the American Energy Alliance in Washington, D.C., said in a statement. "Rep. Arrington's resolution would correct that error and return focus to domestic economic prosperity."

Some observers expected U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft to send the letter withdrawing from Paris because her predecessor, Nikki Haley, in 2017 signed a letter reaffirming U.S. plans to leave after Trump's Rose Garden speech.

Craft, a Trump donor and the wife of coal magnate and Alliance Resource Partners CEO Joseph Craft III, has recused herself from coal-related issues at the United Nations due to her family's deep ties to the industry. She hasn't specified whether that extends to climate change.

Democrats have demanded that she recuse herself from

business related to the Paris Agreement (*E&E News PM*, 1 November). But it's not clear that by not sending the Paris withdrawal letter that's what she's doing. The State Department shares jurisdiction over U.N.-related policy actions.

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Trump begins year-long process to formally exit Paris climate agreement

Exit will not be final until day after 2020 elections

France and China to sign pact on 'irreversibility' of climate accord

Emily Holden *in Washington*

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Donald Trump announced his decision in June 2017 to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement.

Photograph: Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

Donald Trump is moving to formally exit the Paris **climate agreement**, making the United States the only country in the world that will not participate in the

pact, as global temperatures are set to rise 3C and **worsening** extreme weather will **drive** millions into poverty.

The paperwork sent by the US government to withdraw begins a one-year process for exiting the **deal** agreed to at the **UN climate change conference** in Paris in 2015. The **Trump administration** will not be able to finalize its exit until a day after the presidential **election** in November **2020**.

The French presidential office said Emmanuel Macron and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping would sign a pact in Beijing on Wednesday that makes reference to the “irreversibility” of the Paris climate accord.

The Élysée palace official expressed disappointment at Trump’s move, saying: “We regret this and this only makes the Franco-Chinese partnership on the climate and biodiversity more necessary.”

The US secretary of state, **Mike Pompeo**, announced the development on Monday afternoon, saying the agreement would be an “unfair economic burden imposed on American workers, businesses and taxpayers” and that the US has already reduced its heat-trapping emissions.

But organizers of local city and state efforts to curb the crisis across America say the US is still trying to play a role in fighting the **climate crisis**, despite the actions of the federal government.

Carl Pope, vice chair of the group America’s Pledge, said its members – who are vowing to keep fighting the climate emergency – produce more than half the country’s heat-trapping emissions and represent about 70% of the US gross domestic product. Another organization, the US Climate Alliance, includes the governors of 25 states, representing 55% of the US population.

In the Paris agreement, the US agreed to cut its heat-trapping pollution at least 26% below 2005 levels by 2025.



Demonstrators protest Trump's decision to exit the Paris climate agreement in June 2017. Photograph: Scott Olson/Getty Images

Dozens of countries are also pursuing goals to reach **net-zero emissions** by 2050. But they represent only about 11% of the world's climate footprint and exclude the biggest emitters: China, the US and India.

Staying on par with those more advanced countries would require the US government to eliminate pollution from coal and natural gas powered electricity plants, transportation, manufacturing facilities and agriculture. Local action by itself is not likely to be enough.

“We don't think it's likely just with the states we have, we think we need the whole country to be moving together,” Pope said.

Criticism from prominent political and environmental figures was swift and forceful.

The former vice-president and climate campaigner Al Gore said in a **statement posted on Twitter**: “No one person or party can stop our momentum to solve the climate crisis. But those who try will be remembered for their complacency, complicity, and mendacity in attempting to sacrifice the planet for their greed.”

Gore, a Nobel prize co-recipient (with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) for his efforts to raise awareness of the climate crisis, described

Trump's policy as "reckless" but also noted that the withdrawal process cannot start until after the 2020 election.

"Even if [Trump] follows through, it would take just 30 days for a new president to get us back in," Gore added. "This decision is ultimately in the hands of the voters."

The speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, called Trump's move a "disastrous decision that sells out our children's future".

Jean Su, energy director with the Center for Biological Diversity's Climate Law Institute, said: "America is the number one historical contributor to the climate emergency wreaking havoc in burning **California**, the flooded Southeast and the rest of the world."

"The next president must repay this extraordinary climate debt by rapidly moving America to 100% clean energy and financing the decarbonization of the Global South," Su said, referring to the developing world.

In addition, the **Trump administration** has also pulled US funding commitments to help the developing world cut pollution.

John Kerry and Chuck Hagel, president **Barack Obama**'s secretaries of state and defense respectively, in a Washington Post **op-ed**, called it a "dark day for America".



Donald Trump's administration has alternately ignored or denied the climate crisis. Photograph: Saul Loeb/
AFP/Getty Images

“Climate change is already affecting every sector and region of the United States, as hundreds of top scientists from 13 federal agencies made clear in a **report** the White House itself released last year,” they said. “The past five years were the warmest ever recorded. Without steep pollution reductions, climate change will risk tens of thousands of US lives every year by the end of the century.”

They called the Paris agreement, “a start, not a finish line,” but “the best ignition switch the world could agree on to spark international cooperation on this critical issue”.

Senator Tom Carper, the top Democrat on the Senate environment panel, said: “Once again, President Trump is abandoning our global allies for the sake of misplaced political gain. Now America stands alone – nearly 200 countries have joined this global commitment to fighting climate change, even global pariahs like North Korea and civil war-torn countries like Syria.”

Carper said Trump is abandoning “tremendous economic opportunity” and public health benefits.

Trump has alternately ignored or denied the climate crisis. His agencies are

nixing regulations for power plants and cars, and bolstering fossil fuels whenever possible. He **promised**, to widespread **dismay**, to exit the Paris agreement during his campaign.

The Democratic **2020 election** frontrunners **challenging Trump** have all said they would set the country on a path to neutralize its climate pollution by 2050.

Nate Hultman, director of the University of Maryland's center for global sustainability and lead author of this year's America's Pledge report, pointed to new laws in New Mexico, Nevada, Washington, Maine, New York, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico for 100% clean energy targets. Hawaii and California already had such laws.

Together, they represent 16% of the nation's electricity, more than doubling the share from 2018, he said.

“Another way to think about it is that Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris agreement is supported in reality by only about 30% of the economy and 35% of the population,” Hultman said.

Even once the US withdraws, the country can participate as an **observer** in international climate negotiations.

But despite the efforts of subnational governments, recent analysis shows the US is still far off track from its commitments, regardless of whether Trump pulled out.

The US is also far from neutralizing climate emissions by the middle of the century, which as many experts say will be necessary for all countries in order to avert the worst of the crisis.

“We can still get there with a serious shift in policy in the coming years,” said Kate Larsen, director of Rhodium's international energy and climate research.

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Trump administration

begins Paris climate pact exit

Valerie Volcovici
6 MIN READ

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Trump administration said on Monday it filed paperwork to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, the first formal step in a one-year process to exit the global pact to fight climate change.

The move is part of a broader strategy by President Donald Trump to reduce red tape on American industry, but comes at a time scientists and many world governments urge rapid action to avoid the worst impacts of global warming.

Once it exits, the United States - the top historic greenhouse gas emitter and leading

oil and gas producer - will become the only country outside the accord.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo confirmed the step in a Twitter post on Monday and pointed out that the United States had trimmed its emissions here in recent years even as it had grown its energy production.

“The U.S. is proud of our record as a world leader in reducing all emissions, fostering resilience, growing our economy, and ensuring energy for our citizens,” he said.

An official from the French presidential office accompanying President Emmanuel Macron on a state visit to China, said: “We regret this and this only makes the Franco-Chinese partnership on the climate and biodiversity more necessary.”

Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping will sign a pact on Wednesday that includes a paragraph on the “irreversibility of the Paris Agreement,” the official said.

The State Department’s letter to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres starts the clock on a process that will be complete one day after the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

All the top Democratic presidential contenders seeking to unseat Trump have promised to re-engage in the Paris Agreement if they win. But the withdrawal could leave a lasting mark, said Andrew Light, a senior fellow at the World Resources Institute and former adviser to the U.S. climate envoy under Democratic President Barack Obama.

“While it serves the political needs of the Trump administration, we will lose a lot of

traction with respect to U.S. influence globally,” he said.

The Obama administration had signed the United States onto the 2015 pact, promising a 26-28% cut in U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 from 2005 levels.

Trump campaigned on a promise to rescind that pledge, saying it would hurt the U.S. economy while leaving other big polluters like China to increase emissions. He was bound by U.N. rules to wait until Nov. 4, 2019, to file exit papers.

Trump has already moved, however, to unwind a slew of Obama-era rules limiting emissions - including from the electricity industry, automobiles and the oil and gas drilling sector. A report this year by state attorneys general said those rollbacks here could amount to a boost in U.S. carbon emissions of more than 200

million tonnes a year by 2025.

Teresa Ribera, Spain's environment minister, said on Twitter that the formal withdrawal - although expected - dealt a blow to the Paris deal. Spain will host the next round of climate negotiations in place of Chile in early December.

“I deeply regret this decision, which, no matter how it was announced, is no less worrying,” she wrote.

STATE, LOCAL ACTION

Environmental groups also slammed the move.

“The next president will need to rejoin the accord immediately and commit to the rapid, wholesale clean-energy transformation the climate emergency

demands,” said Jean Su, energy director with the Center for Biological Diversity.

A report by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said last year the world had little over a decade to rapidly reduce emissions from fossil fuels use to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees F).

Beyond that warming threshold, the planet becomes more likely to see dramatic cascading effects of climate change, from sea-level rise to more frequent intense storms, droughts, floods and heat waves, according to the report.

In the absence of U.S. federal leadership on climate change, several Democratic states and municipal governments have sought to apply their own regulations curbing emissions and promoting renewable energy

sources such as solar and wind.

Alden Meyer, director of policy at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said states, cities and businesses representing more than half of the U.S. gross domestic product and population remained committed to the Paris Agreement's goals.

“Unlike the president, these leaders understand that reducing emissions creates jobs and protects local communities, while it is inaction on climate that poses the real threat to prosperity,” he said.

Until its formal exit, the United States will continue to participate in negotiations over technical aspects of the agreement, represented by career State Department officials.

The United States and China, the world's

two largest carbon emitters, have recently been leading negotiations of the Paris “rule book” that outlines transparency and reporting rules.

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