

World leaders pledge climate cooperation despite other rifts

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, MATTHEW DALY and CHRISTINA LARSON
yesterday



1 of 10

President Joe Biden speaks to the virtual Leaders Summit on Climate, from the East Room of the White House, Thursday, April 22, 2021, in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

WASHINGTON (AP) — The leaders of Russia and China put aside their raw-worded disputes with U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday long enough to pledge international cooperation on cutting climate-wrecking coal and petroleum emissions in a livestreamed summit showcasing America's return to the fight against global warming.

Neither Vladimir Putin nor Xi Jinping immediately followed the United States and some of its developed allies in making specific new pledges to reduce damaging fossil fuel pollution during the first day of the two-day U.S.-hosted summit. But climate advocates hoped the high-profile — if glitch-ridden — virtual gathering would kickstart new action by major

polluters, paving the way for a November U.N. meeting in Glasgow critical to drastically slowing climate change over the coming decade.

The entire world faces “a moment of peril” but also “a moment of opportunity,” Biden declared, speaking from a TV-style chrome-blue set for the virtual summit of 40 world leaders. Participants appeared one after the other onscreen for what appeared to be a mix of live and recorded addresses.

“The signs are unmistakable,” Biden said. “The science is undeniable. The cost of inaction keeps mounting.”

Biden’s new U.S. commitment, timed to the summit, would [cut America’s fossil fuel emissions as much as 52% by 2030](#). It comes after four years of international withdrawal from the issue under President Donald Trump, who mocked the science of climate change and pulled the U.S. out of the landmark 2015 Paris climate accord.

Biden’s administration this week is sketching out a vision of a prosperous, clean-energy United States where factories churn out cutting-edge batteries and electric cars for export, line workers re-lay an efficient national electrical grid and crews cap abandoned oil and gas rigs and coal mines.

But Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell dismissed the administration’s plans as costly and ineffective.

“This is quite the one-two punch,” McConnell said in a Senate speech Thursday. “Toothless requests of our foreign adversaries ... and maximum pain for American citizens.”

At the summit, Japan announced its own new 46% emissions reduction target and South Korea said it would stop public financing of new coal-fired power plants, potentially an important step toward persuading China and other coal-reliant nations to curb building and funding of new ones as well.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, one of the leaders shown watching summit proceedings in the coronavirus pandemic’s familiar Brady Bunch-style multibox conference screen, said his nation would up its fossil fuel pollution cuts from 30% to at least 40%.

Travel precautions under the pandemic compelled the summit to play out on livestream, limiting opportunities for spontaneous interaction and negotiation. Its opening hours were sometimes marked by [electronic echoes, random beeps and off-screen voices](#).

But the summit also marshaled an impressive display of the world's most powerful leaders speaking on the single issue of climate change.

China's Xi, whose country is the world's biggest emissions culprit, followed by the United States, spoke first among the other global figures. He made no reference to disputes over territorial claims, trade and other matters that had made it uncertain until Wednesday that he would even take part in the U.S. summit. And he said China would work with America in cutting emissions.

"To protect the environment is to protect productivity, and to boost the environment is to boost productivity. It's as simple as that," Xi said.

Putin and his government have been irate over Biden's characterization of him as a "killer" for Russia's aggressive moves against its opponents, and he is under pressure this week over the declining health of jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny. But he made no mention of those disputes in his own climate remarks.

Full Coverage: [Climate](#)

"Russia is genuinely interested in galvanizing international cooperation so as to look further for effective solutions to climate change as well as to all other vital challenges," Putin said. Russia by some measures is the world's fourth-biggest emitter of climate-damaging fossil fuel fumes.

Climate efforts in recent years have proved a forum where even rival world leaders want to be seen as putting aside disputes to serve as international statesmen and women, even though the cumulative output of fossil fuel emissions is still hurtling the Earth toward disastrous temperature rises.

The pandemic made gathering world leaders for the climate summit too risky. So Biden's staff built a small set in the East Room that looked like it was taken from a daytime talk show.

Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris joined Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House climate envoy John Kerry at a horseshoe-shaped table set up around a giant potted plant to watch fellow leaders' speeches.

The format meant a cavalcade of short speeches by world leaders, some scripted, some not. "This is not bunny-hugging," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said of the climate efforts. "This is about growth and jobs."

The Biden administration's pledge would require by far the most ambitious U.S. climate effort ever, nearly doubling the reductions that the Obama administration had committed to in the Paris climate accord.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was one of many allies welcoming the U.S. return after Trump..

"I'm delighted to see that the United States is back, is back to work together with us in climate politics," Merkel declared in her virtual appearance.

"Because there can be no doubt about the world needing your contribution if we really want to fulfill our ambitious goals."

Pope Francis contributed a video from the Vatican, saying, "I wish you success in this beautiful decision to meet, walk together going forward and I am with you all the way."

The new urgency comes as scientists say that climate change caused by coal plants, car engines and other fossil fuel use is worsening droughts, floods, hurricanes, wildfires and other disasters and that humans are running out of time to stave off catastrophic extremes of global warming.

Leaders of smaller states and island nations buffeted by rising seas and worsening hurricanes appealed for aid and fast emissions cuts from world powers.

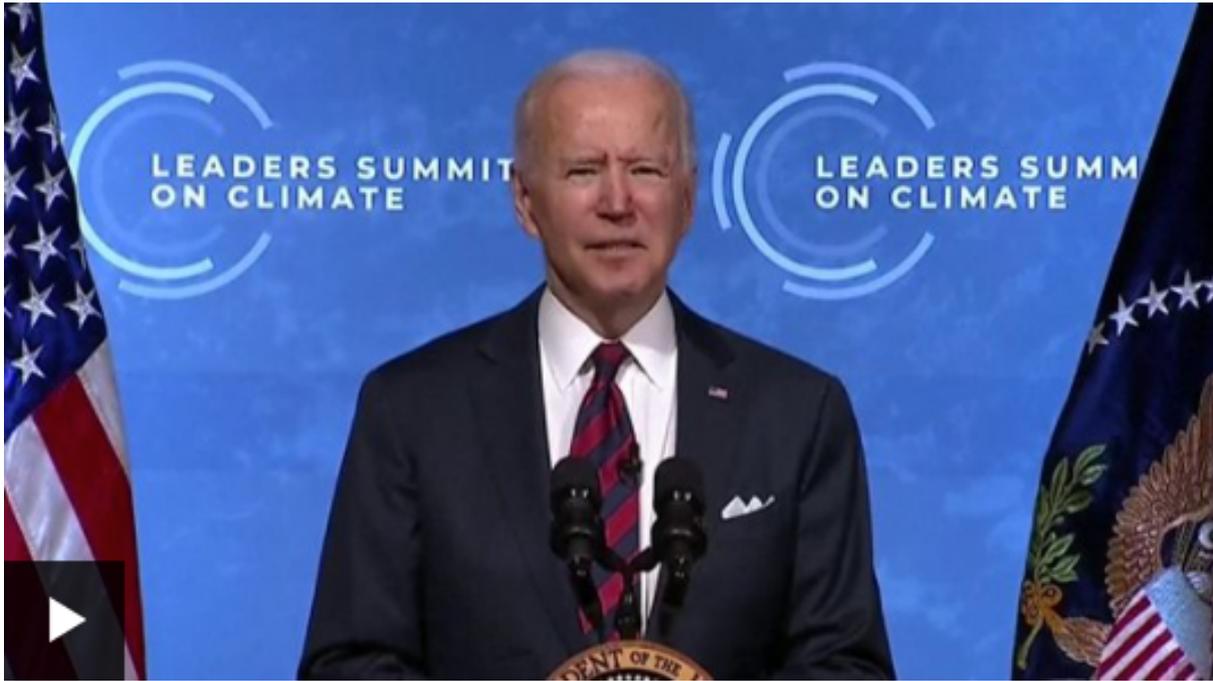
"We are the least contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, but the most affected by climate change," said Gaston Alfonso Browne, prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda. He called for debt relief and more international assistance to recover from storms and the pandemic to prevent a flow of climate refugees. His people he said, are "teetering on the edge of despair."

Longtime climate policy experts, no strangers to climate summits with solemn pledges, watched some speeches with skepticism. After Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro promised an end to clearcutting in the Amazon, Dan Wilkinson of Human Rights Watch's environmental programs noted, "It is going to be hard for anyone to take it seriously until they actually start taking steps."

Knickmeyer reported from Oklahoma City. Associated Press writers Ashok Sharma in New Delhi, Joe McDonald in Beijing, Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow, David Biller in Rio de Janeiro, Nicole Winfield in Vatican City, Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo and Aamer Madhani, Seth Borenstein, Lisa Mascaro and Alexandra Jaffe in Washington contributed to this report.

Biden: This will be 'decisive decade' for tackling climate change

By Matt McGrath
Environment correspondent
Published
10 hours ago



Joe Biden urged nations to help "overcome the existential crisis of our time"

US President Joe Biden has told a major summit that we are in a "decisive decade" for tackling climate change.

The US has pledged to cut carbon emissions by 50-52% below 2005 levels by the year 2030.

This new target, which was unveiled at a virtual summit of 40 global leaders, essentially doubles their previous promise. But the leaders of India and China, two of the world's biggest emitters, made no new commitments.

"Scientists tell us that this is the decisive decade - this is the decade we must make decisions that will avoid the worst consequences of the climate crisis," President Biden said at the summit's opening address.

"We must try to keep the Earth's temperature to an increase of 1.5C. The world beyond 1.5 degrees means more frequent and intense fires, floods, droughts, heatwaves and hurricanes - tearing through communities, ripping away lives and livelihoods."

- **A really simple guide to climate change**
- **EU agrees to cut CO2 emissions by 55% by 2030**
- **Australia resists calls for tougher climate targets**

- **Government to speed up UK climate change target**
- **Carbon 'surge' expected in post-Covid energy boom**

He said there was a moral and economic imperative to immediately act on climate change.

Referring to America's new carbon-cutting pledge, President Biden added: "The signs are unmistakable, the science is undeniable, and the cost of inaction keeps mounting.

ADVERTISEMENT

"The US isn't waiting, we are resolving to take action."

Climate activist Greta Thunberg, who was testifying before Congress on Thursday, challenged world leaders to do more on the climate crisis.

"Unlike you, my generation will not give up without a fight," she said. "How long do you honestly believe that people in power will get away with it?"

The UK is playing a critical role this year as president of the crucial COP26 later this year. The government is tasked with achieving agreement in Glasgow when world leaders meet there in November.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson was in ebullient form on his virtual conference address. He assured global leaders that tackling climate change was "not bunny-hugging".

media caption

Greta Thunberg: How long do you believe you'll get away with it?

At the summit, Mr Johnson called President Biden's announcement about cutting US greenhouse gas emissions "game-changing".

"We can do this together across the world. It's going to mean the richest nations coming together and exceeding the \$100bn commitment they already made in 2009," he said.

Major change to American way of life

Climate has been the central focus of the Biden administration's first few months in office.

As well as re-joining the Paris climate pact and organising Thursday's summit, the Biden team has been working on a strong pledge to convince the world that they mean business. The fact that President Biden is prepared to go beyond a 50% cut will be a welcome surprise to many scientists and campaigners.



ROBERT ALEXANDER

"By announcing a bold target of cutting emissions 50-52% below 2005 by the end of the decade, President Biden has met the moment and the urgency that the climate crisis demands," said Nathaniel Keohane from the US Environmental Defense Fund.

"This target aligns with what the science says is necessary to put the world on the path to a safer climate, and vaults the US into the top tier of world leaders on climate ambition."

But the new pledge will mean major changes to the American way of life. Coal will have to disappear from the electricity mix, while gas guzzling cars and trucks will have to go electric.

Others stepping up with new promises included Canada, Japan and South Korea.

But Canada's promise to limit carbon emissions by 40-45% by 2030 came in for immediate criticism from campaigners.

"Canada's new 2030 emissions reduction target is stronger than its previous commitment, but it falls short of what is needed to avoid dangerous levels of warming," said Helen Mountford from the World Resources Institute.



Despite some earlier uncertainty, China President Xi Jinping will address the US summit

"Canada's efforts to deliver real action on the ground are welcome, like placing a price on carbon pollution, but the country should aim for a much more ambitious goal than what it put forward today."

Meanwhile, Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the country was "ready to demonstrate its leadership" on the climate.

Mr Suga said that Japan would reduce emissions by 46% in 2030 compared to 2013 levels. Previously, the country had pledged only a 26% cut in emissions.

South Korea also pledged a new target and said they would stop financing the building of coal-fired power stations overseas.

But China made no new pledges but hinted that coal, which is set to grow again as the economy recovers from Covid, will be tackled in the next few years.

"We will strictly control the coal-fired power generation projects," the country's President Xi Jinping told the gathering.



Protestors outside the White House hold cardboard cut outs of the leaders due to meet

"We will strictly limit the increase in coal consumption over the 14th five-year plan period and phase it down in the 15th five-year plan period."

However, that's likely to be after 2026.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), China will be responsible for around half the growth in coal around the world this year, as economies recover from Covid.

India's Prime Minister Modi stressed that his country's per capita emissions were 60% lower than the global average.

He said that lifestyle changes should play a bigger role in limiting climate change. However he made no new promises on curbing emissions.

President Biden's team is also urging countries that have been slow to embrace action on climate change - such as Australia and Brazil - to raise their ambition.

Brazil and Australia's sceptical approach to the issue had found favour in the Trump White House. But that's no longer the case.