

Opening Statement  
Chairman Paul D. Tonko  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change  
Hearing on “We’ll Always Have Paris: Filling the Leadership Void Caused by Federal Inaction on  
Climate Change”  
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In late 2015, driven by American leadership, the world came together to acknowledge the threat of climate change and make plans for cooperative, global efforts in mitigation, adaptation, and finance. The purpose is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit global temperature increase to well below 2 degrees Celsius.

The ingenuity of the Paris Agreement is that it builds from the bottom-up. It does not dictate specific reductions or remedies.

Each country sets their own targets, submits a Nationally Determined Contribution, or NDC, to achieve those targets, reports on their emissions, and hopefully increases their ambition over time.

The United States, for example, committed to reduce its emissions by 26 to 28% below 2005 levels in 2025.

This achievable commitment was based on a plan that included a number of actions: adopting fuel economy standards for light- and heavy-duty vehicles, cutting carbon pollution from new and existing power plants, reducing methane emissions, addressing building sector efficiency, and developing new alternatives to HFCs.

Today, despite the obvious and growing threat posed by the climate crisis, many of these policies are being delayed or undone by the Trump Administration. The Rhodium Group’s “Taking Stock 2018” report found that U.S. emissions under current policy are heading towards 12 to 20% below 2005 levels in 2025, well-short of the U.S. target.

In June 2017, President Trump announced his intent to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, although it is important to note that this cannot be done formally until November 2020.

Still, as time goes by, I know that many of his supporters, possibly including some in this room, will come to regret this decision.

President Trump may not understand the importance of international climate cooperation, but thousands of others, including states, cities, businesses, and universities have stepped up and said, “We’re still in.”

If you add them all up, these non-federal actors would have the third largest economy in the world.

And their commitments are not just lip service. They are taking tangible steps and filling America’s leadership void through organizations such as the U.S. Climate Alliance and the Climate Mayors coalition. Last year, California even organized the Global Climate Action Summit with world leaders and garnered a new round of commitments.

To support these efforts, the climate organization America's Pledge has sought to compile and quantify subnational actions. According to their "Fulfilling America's Pledge" report, these actions could meet about two-thirds of what is needed for America's commitment.

While these efforts are keeping our targets within reach, they are not enough. More must be done. We need federal policies and real leadership.

While President Trump has pulled America's seat at the table, other countries, including China and India, continue to write the international rules on emissions monitoring, reporting, and transparency, and work towards achieving their NDCs.

I have heard some spurious arguments from Members in the past about the Paris Agreement and the commitments of other countries.

But people must understand what we give up by walking away.

If those Members do not trust these other countries, that is an important reason to stay in and fight for stronger reporting and transparency rules.

And if Members really want other countries to set bolder targets, the U.S. should not set such a poor example and hurt our credibility.

At our last hearing, I was pleased to hear a new, bipartisan consensus around the realities of climate change.

America's NDC is a voluntary, non-binding commitment. If anyone thinks it is too difficult to achieve, they should say so, and push for a different target. But if we agree that climate change is a problem, there is no reason to support the President's withdrawal.

Our Subcommittee members also seem to agree that energy innovation is an important part of any climate solution.

In this vein, I want to remind my colleagues of the announcement that coincided with Paris under the banner of "Mission Innovation." 20 countries committed to doubling their clean energy R&D investments over 5 years, which will be bolstered by private sector commitments. I hope we can expect those calling for more innovation to also support this initiative.

Global problems require global cooperation. We accept this when it comes to countless security, health, and economic issues. And we know that climate change impacts all of these areas, and more.

We cannot hide from the mantle—and the accompanying responsibility—of being the greatest nation on Earth. The United States must lead. Others will be guided by our example.

I said in our first climate hearing that we are behind, but it is not too late. We are still in Paris, and there is still time to reach America's 2025 target. But that takes Congress getting serious. It means pushing back on Administration actions that take us in the wrong direction.

And it means putting forward new policies that will accelerate clean energy deployment and reduce climate pollution.

Thank you all for being here this morning. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.