



March 31, 2021

**THE CLEAN
ECONOMIC
REVOLUTION:
REJOINING THE
PARIS CLIMATE
AGREEMENT AND
THE FUTURE OF
CLIMATE
LEGISLATION IN
AMERICA**

Climate (/full-blog/category/Climate), Environmental (/full-blog/category/Environmental), Impact!
(/full-blog/category/Impact%21)

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“History may very well judge it as the turning point for our planet,” touted former President Barack Obama in a 2016 address regarding the monumental global agreement to join the climate change fight following the Paris Climate Accord.[i] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn1) In December 2015, 196 parties signed a legally binding international treaty, known informally as the Paris Climate Agreement, that acts to limit a country’s emission of harmful greenhouse gases in order to lower the global temperature of the Earth 1.5-2 degrees Celsius.[ii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn2) Regarded as a “turning point” that brought “unbridled optimism” in the fight against climate change, the treaty was effectively enacted in November 2016.[iii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn3) Nearly six months later, the United States sent notice that it would withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, a commitment that formally ended in November 2020.[iv] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn4) However, through executive action taken in January 2021, President Joe Biden signed the United States back into the original Paris Climate Agreement, sparking both praise and criticism.[v] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn5)

After nearly 30 years of reforming and retracting both international and domestic legislative action, the Agreement is one of the only active and binding climate policies in the United States. Climate change began to take the world stage in 1979 at the first World Climate Conference, which catapulted years and years of climate change effort mixed with years and years of climate change retraction.[vi] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn6) For example, the Kyoto Protocol, which was agreed to by the United States under President Bill Clinton in 1997, also targeted reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and was initially signed by 37 industrial nations.[vii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn7) The U.S. withdrew from the agreement in 2001.[viii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-

90192DB31359#_edn8) Even former President Obama criticized parts of the Kyoto deal in his most recent book while also enacting several new policies and reforms during his tenure.[ix] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn9) President Obama sought to pass four bills through congress regarding climate change (more than the two the previous nine years), but none of them passed through congress.[x] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn10)

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One legislative act, The Clean Power Plan, which limited carbon pollution from power plants, did effectively get voted into law in 2015, although congress repealed the Act later in 2015 (which was vetoed by President Obama).[xi] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn11) The Clean Power Plan's final demise was in 2017 when former President Donald Trump repealed the Act by executive order. This wasn't the only act of repeal by President Trump, who also annulled the Climate Action Plan set out in 2013, the Executive Action on Climate Change in 2013, the Moratorium on Coal leasing in 2016, and of course, the Paris Climate Agreement, among others.[xii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-

90192DB31359#_edn12) Therefore, aside from individual state action, the federal government had very little—if any—climate change policy in effect when President Joe Biden took office in January 2021.

The momentum of rejoining the Paris Agreement could spark serious climate reform in the United States, as President Joe Biden says climate change is the “number one issue facing humanity.”[xiii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn13) Critiques of the Paris Agreement disagree with the monetary pledge towards global climate relief, saying tax dollars would benefit those outside of the U.S.[xiv] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn14) Others, like Senator John Barrasso (R-WYO), say that instead of setting domestic policies like energy efficiency standards, the free market should address climate change.[xv] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn15) Although 196 other countries signed the Paris Agreement, Senator Barrasso also says the Paris Agreement puts the U.S. at a disadvantage with other countries.[xvi] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn16)

Rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement and making climate change a priority is more significant than any monetary pledge or energy-efficient standards. The Paris Climate Agreement calls upon the respective countries to individualize plans and set policies in order to target lower emissions and sustain commitment.[xvii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn17) The united initiative towards combatting climate change would spark a revolution by not only helping the climate but shifting and industrializing the American economy into a substantive and sustainable future. Domestic policy proposed by the new administration would dramatically shift the fossil-fueled U.S. into a cleaner, more sustainable upturn.[xviii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn18) This commitment to changing infrastructure in the U.S. would mean a high up-front cost but could yield a boost in the short-term GDP between 2% and 9%.[xix] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn19) Meanwhile, the U.S. GDP growth is “certain to fall” if climate change action isn’t taken.[xx] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn20) Climate change action focused on clean energy creates more jobs.[xxi] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn21) \$1 million spent on clean energy in the U.S. generates twice as many jobs as the same amount spent on fossil fuels.[xxii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn22) Furthermore, clean energy and infrastructure spending will reduce the energy costs for low-income, rural households and create new and innovative industry sectors in fossil fuel-dependent regions across the U.S.[xxiii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_edn23)

Whether it be the turning point in saving the planet or the clean energy revolution of the economy, the United States is set up for a progressive future after rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement. After years of back and forth, this could be the spark that history looks back upon and reflects a momentous change in domestic climate policy.

[i] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref1) President Barack Obama, Address at the White House Rose Garden (Oct. 5, 2016).

[ii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref2) *The Paris Agreement*, U. N. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

[iii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref3) See Oliver Milman, *Paris climate deal a 'turning point' in global warming fight, Obama says*, The Guardian (Oct. 5, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/oct/05/obama-paris-climate-deal-ratification>.

[iv] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref4) Lisa Friedman, *Trump Serves Notice to Quit Paris Climate Agreement*, N.Y. Times (Nov. 4, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/climate/trump-paris-agreement-climate.html>.

[v] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref5) Press Release, The White House, The Paris Climate Agreement (Jan. 20, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/01/20/paris-climate-agreement/>; see also John Krueger, *LETTER: Paris climate accord a bad deal for U.S.* News and Tribune (Feb. 10, 2021), https://www.newsandtribune.com/opinion/letter-paris-climate-accord-a-bad-deal-for-u-s/article_fa2babb2-6bc8-11eb-8b4e-cb09aaf18f74.html; and *World leaders laud U.S. return to Paris climate accord under Biden*, L.A. Times (Jan. 21, 2021), <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-01-21/world-leaders-laud-us-biden-return-paris-climate-agreement>.

[vi] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref6) See Sarah Childress, *Timeline: The Politics of Climate Change*, Frontline (Oct. 23, 2012), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/timeline-the-politics-of-climate-change/>.

[vii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref7) *What is the Kyoto Protocol?*, U. N., https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol.

[viii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref8) Childress, *supra* note vi.

[ix] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref9) See Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* 504-507 (2020).

[x] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref10) See *Federal Government Activity on Climate Change*, Ballotpedia (2021), https://ballotpedia.org/Federal_government_activity_on_climate_change.

[xi] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref11) *Id.*

[xii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref12) Madison Park, *6 Obama climate policies that Trump orders change*, CNN (Mar. 28, 2017), <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/28/politics/climate-change-obama-rules-trump/index.html>.

[xiii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref13) Emma Newburger, *Joe Biden calls climate change 'the number one issue facing humanity'*, CNBC (Oct. 24, 2020), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/10/24/joe-biden-climate-change-is-number-one-issue-facing-humanity.html>.

[xiv] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref14) Morrison, *supra* note v.

[xv] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref15) John Barrasso, *President Trump is right to get us out of the bad Paris climate accord: Sen. Barrasso*, USA Today (Nov. 5, 2019), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/11/05/president-trump-leave-bad-paris-agreement-john-barrasso-editorials-debates/4170938002/>.

[xvi] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref16) *Id.*

[xvii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref17) *Supra* note ii.

[xviii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref18) *The Biden Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice*, Joe Biden (2020), <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>.

[xix] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref19) Jonathan Ponciano, *Here's What Biden's \$2 Trillion Climate-Focused Infrastructure Plan Means for Stock and the Economy*, Forbes (Feb. 12, 2021), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathanponciano/2021/02/12/bidens-2-trillion-climate-focused-infrastructure-plan-means-for-stocks-and-the-economy/?sh=50f3dcbb27b4>.

[xx] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref20) *Id.*

[xxi] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref21) Joel Jaeger, et al., *10 Charts Show the Economic Benefit of US Climate Action*, World Res. Inst. (July 28, 2020), <https://www.wri.org/blog/2020/07/economic-benefits-climate-action-us>.

[xxii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref22) *Id.*

[xxiii] (applewebdata://BED45721-8147-4AD3-BCF3-90192DB31359#_ednref23) *Id.*

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