

PARIS AGREEMENT

Background

- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
 - UNFCCC negotiated at the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1992
 - Went into force with annual conferences starting in 1994
 - This year's meeting in Paris was 21st Conference of Parties or COP 21.
- Kyoto Protocol
 - Negotiated 1997, to run to 2020
 - Set up binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
 - Mandated reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to “a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”
 - Covered only developed countries – China and India left out
 - United States did not ratify, Canada pulled out.
- Copenhagen Accord 2009
 - Widely considered a failure – nickname “Brokenhagen”
 - Not legally binding
 - Set no targets for reducing emissions
 - This was when Obama and Clinton walked in on secret meeting of China, South Africa, India and Brazil. Led to international rancor and discord.
 - One success: Setting 2C above pre-industrial levels as the limit for global warming.

Leadup to Paris

- New climate regime
 - Paris Agreement to go into place after Kyoto Protocol expires in 2020
 - Rather than imposing targets, each country made “intended nationally determined contributions” or voluntary pledges for reducing carbon emissions
 - Agreement would cover all countries, not just developed countries
- Clean Power Plan
 - EPA proposed in June 2014, issued rule in August 2015.
 - Linchpin of the U.S. commitment to the Paris Agreement
 - First time the U.S. has regulated greenhouse gas emissions
 - Goal: Reduce CO₂ emissions from power plants by 32 percent by 2030 from 2005 levels.
 - Mandates various goals for states to lower carbon emissions from power plants, but provides multiple ways they can do it.
 - Ohio's goal is aggressive because we are one of the most polluting states.
 - 27 states including Ohio have sued to overturn the plan. At the same time Ohio is also putting together a plan to meet CPP requirements.
 - Supreme Court has put a stay on Clean Power Plan until state lawsuits sorted out.
- U.S. China Agreement – September 2015
 - Two biggest greenhouse gas emitters – China passed US in 2005
 - U.S. agrees to lower overall carbon emissions 26-28% from 2005 levels by 2025.
 - China agrees to peak CO₂ emissions by 2030 (have since said earlier), and increase share of renewable energy to 20% by 2030. China also has cap and trade in several cities and will institute a nationwide cap and trade system in 2017.
 - Paved the way for other nations to make commitments to the Paris climate talks

Paris Climate Talks

- Took place November 30 – December 11, 2015
- In shadow of Paris terrorist attacks of November 13
 - French government banned demonstrations – many arrests November 30
 - 600,000 marched in cities around world – 100 at climate march in Columbus
- Tens of thousands of activists from all over the world attended and held events
 - Indigenous groups
 - Rights of nature tribunal
 - Exxon trials
 - Naomi Klein's Leapfrog Manifesto
 - Anti-fracking demonstrations
 - Trade and climate

Strengths

- For the first time, agreement covers all countries
 - 195 countries signed
 - Both developed and developing countries set targets
- Sets up Green Climate Fund
 - \$100 billion a year by 2020 from wealthy countries to finance climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries that suffer effects of climate change
- Historic in that it not only stated goal of limiting temperature rise to 2C, but also states we must get as close to 1.5C as possible
 - Climate Vulnerable Forum of island nations strongly lobbied for this
 - Difference between 1.5C and 2C is the existence of many island nations
- Includes requirement to review emissions targets every five years and ratchet them up

Weaknesses

- Emissions targets not legally binding
 - Could not be or would have to go through U.S. Senate – full of climate deniers
 - Even financial commitments could not be legally binding (but Obama got \$3 billion for U.S. commitment in omnibus bill)
 - But requirement to review goals every five years is legally binding
 - And if nations do not meet their commitments, they can be shamed by other countries. Naming and shaming can work very well in such situations.
- All commitments together still only get us to warming of 2.7C.
 - With no action we are looking at 4-5C warming – catastrophic
 - Currently we are at 0.8C with 0.8C in the pipeline due to long half-life of carbon
 - Much more needs to be done to get this down to 2C much less 1.5C which is essentially where we are now if we stopped all greenhouse gas emissions today.
- Trade and climate – Naomi Klein critique
 - TPP is legally binding – would allow countries to sue governments over laws that threaten “future expected profits”
 - Lawsuits heard by panel of international lawyers who can serve as either judge or advocate.
 - TransCanada now suing U.S. over veto of Keystone Pipeline under similar clause in NAFTA
 - U.S. has ability to defend itself in this setting or pay the fine. Small countries don't.

Where we stand today: Precarious

- Obama's entire climate plan rests on executive action
 - Clean Power Plan is a regulation through EPA
 - Paris Agreement not legally binding
 - This means a different administration could come in and dismantle all progress
- Clean Power Plan could get overturned in court
 - More of a concern before Scalia died.
 - 4-4 ruling by court means that previous ruling stands
 - DC Court of Appeals ruled against challenges to Clean Power Plan

Presidential candidates on climate

- Hillary Clinton
 - 500 million solar panels installed
 - Renewable energy to power every home by end of first administration (2020)
 - Cut greenhouse gas emissions 30 percent below 2005 levels by end of second administration (2024)
- Bernie Sanders
 - Cut carbon pollution 40 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050
 - Put a tax on carbon pollution
 - Return proceeds to American consumers
 - Use some to help coal miners and others in fossil fuel industry transition to clean energy jobs
 - Use some to help poor and vulnerable communities most impacted by climate change
 - Repeal subsidies to fossil fuel corporations
 - Create 10 million jobs in clean energy industries
- Donald Trump
 - Dismantle EPA
 - Climate change is a hoax created by China to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive
 - We can leave "a little bit" for the environment but commerce comes first
- Ted Cruz
 - Oversaw Congressional hearings attacking board president of Sierra Club
 - "Climate change is not a science. It's religion"
 - Uses climate denier talking points – e.g. "pause" in global warming
- John Kasich
 - Says humans are a contributor to climate change
 - Supports "all of the above" energy plan
 - But signed SB 310 making Ohio the first state to roll back renewable energy standards, over the objections of environmentalist, business, and faith groups.
 - Also signed draconian setback law that squashed Ohio's wind industry. Wind turbines must be ¼ mile from any structure. Fracking rigs can be next to farmhouse.

Action Item: Write your representative: Carbon fee and dividend