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Democracy Dies in Darkness



Trump has formally pulled the U.S. out of the Paris agreement. This is a dark time for America.

By **John F. Kerry** and **Chuck Hagel**

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John F. Kerry was U.S. secretary of state from 2013 to 2017. Chuck Hagel was U.S. defense secretary from 2013 to 2015.

On Monday, President Trump took the step he promised in 2017 to officially withdraw the United States from the Paris agreement on climate change, which every other country on Earth has signed. This is not America first; once again, it's America isolated.

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. The past five years were the warmest ever recorded. Without steep pollution reductions, climate change will risk tens of thousands of U.S. lives every year by the end of the century. Rising seas, increased storm surge and tidal flooding threaten \$1 trillion in public infrastructure and private property now along U.S. coastlines. The United States has experienced at least \$400 billion in weather and climate disaster costs since 2014. The recent hurricanes that slammed America's southern coasts, as well as historic wildfires in California, resulted in more American victims of severe weather juiced by climate change than ever before.

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Climate change also threatens national security. As we testified to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in April, this link has been clear for decades. Our military bases, and hence our security preparedness, are threatened by sea-level rise and other impacts. If you put a map of places with high political instability today over a map of places with high climate vulnerability, the two would be nearly identical. The American Security Project, an organization of retired flag officers who spent their careers in uniform and other leaders, calls climate change a “ring road” issue, meaning that climate change will worsen other threats facing the nation. “It will change disease vectors. It will drive migration. These changes, in turn, could affect state stability and harm global security,” the ASP reported.

Other major powers will benefit economically from the U.S. withdrawal from Paris. By putting up roadblocks to the necessary transition to a low-carbon global economy, Trump is making American businesses less competitive and leaving new jobs and economic opportunities up for grabs to other countries. The 2018 report by the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate details the evidence that between now and 2030, policies and measures aimed at solving this problem and building resilience could generate at least \$26 trillion in economic benefits worldwide in industries including renewables and energy efficiency.

The clean-energy economy already employs 3.3 million Americans, with solar employing twice as many people as coal. But the United States is lagging far behind other countries that are determined to capitalize on this low-carbon market. For every dollar the United States invests in renewable energy, China puts in three. That’s why globally 99 percent of electric buses on the road are in China. India has the largest solar and wind targets in the world, and the nation is making steady progress in achieving them. And the European Union announced last year that at least 25 percent of its next budget will go toward transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

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The Paris agreement was a start, not a finish line. But it was the best ignition switch the world could agree on to spark international cooperation on this critical issue, something that many leading Republicans agree is essential to do because the United States can't solve this problem alone. Without this agreement, China, India and many other major emitters would not have a commitment to the world to reduce their emissions, let alone one with transparency and international oversight for all.

Monday marks a dark day among those of us who believe in working with allies to share the burden of solving tough problems — especially a climate crisis that demands a World War II-style mass mobilization before it's too late. But there's a silver lining: Even as the Trump administration submits the paperwork to surrender our leadership on a climate accord we wrote, we won't officially exit the agreement until Nov. 4, 2020. We have an election in our country on Nov. 3, 2020.

The United States can rejoin the agreement at any time once we have a leader willing to do so. We must all mitigate the damage Trump does to the United States before then, but if there was ever an election in which U.S. leadership and the nation's security were on the ballot, 2020 is it. Americans can pull the lever for the clearest choice ever on climate action to ensure that on Day One of a new administration, America will be back.

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Todd Stern: President Trump, stay in the Paris agreement. You'll regret it if you don't.

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