

# Leaving The Paris Accord?

Larry J. Schweiger

November 4, 2020

Shortly after taking office in 2016, Trump announced that the U.S. would leave the Paris Climate Accord on November 4th, 2020. Today's decision to reject science and abandon the Paris Agreement is making the U.S. the only country to formally abandon our commitment and leaves nature without a safety net.

With more than 130 years of climate science, we should have known that burning fossil fuels puts carbon dioxide in the sky and that carbon dioxide traps heat. Scientists have long warned that carbon dioxide pollution would seriously harm the Earth and its inhabitants.

Having conducted over ten thousand calculations with pencil and paper, Svante Arrhenius published an article in Philosophical Magazine in April 1896. He warned: *"We are evaporating our coal mines into the air, adding so much carbon dioxide into the air as to change the transparency of the atmosphere. With each passing year, air must be trapping more, and darker (infrared) rays more and more earthlight. Eventually, this change might very well heat the planet to heights outside all human experience."* Arrhenius used published research, including a carbon dioxide study by Pittsburgh's Samuel Pierpont Langley, who, in 1880, used a device called a bolometer that John Brashear built to measure infrared radiation.

History can be very instructive. The history of climate change reveals an outrageous pattern of suppression of climate science, corporate coverups, and massive funding of disinformation campaigns that continues to this day, moving us dangerously close to a catastrophic cliff.

Numerous organizations from the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, Club for Growth, American Petroleum Institute, the Cato Institute, and the American Legislative Exchange Council have kept Americans confused and distracted. Several dark money political entities too numerous to list are playing a long game with a political stratagem aimed at blocking action on climate change by funding political campaigns, suppressing science, and generating wildly misleading advertisements.

All the world's major coal, oil and gas companies led the decades-long suppression of climate science. They used their considerable lobbying influence to block legislative inquiries and actions. E&E News recently revealed that Ford and General Motors knew in the 1960s that motor vehicles caused climate change. Scientists at both companies linked emissions from cars and trucks to climate change. The Center for International Environmental Law found that G.M. and Ford spent decades "eschewing electric vehicles" and fuel efficiency while doubling down on polluting SUVs for greater profits. The automakers were also funding climate denial groups to block international climate agreements and stricter U.S. emissions standards. Automakers, along with other fossil fuel lobbyists and other bottom-feeding shills, have figured out how to put sand in the legislative process's slow-moving gears, particularly surrounding energy policy and

carbon pollution control. They are knowingly betraying our children by preventing Congress and the White House from acting in concert with compelling science.

As hard as it is to imagine, there was a time when a Republican President wanted to address climate change. Running for President in 1988, President George H. W. Bush campaigned as “the environmental president,” repositioning his campaign after serving as the Vice President to Ronald Reagan, an anti-environmental President. On his campaign stop at the Lake Erie Metropark in Michigan on August 31st, 1988, Bush walked on the beach with Tom Washington, the executive director of Michigan United Conservation Clubs. “Those who think we are powerless to do anything about the greenhouse effect forget about the ‘White House effect.’ As President, I intend to do something about it.” Bush promised to convene an international conference on the environment, adding that he would invite the Chinese, the Soviets, and officials from emerging economies. “We will talk about global warming, and we will act.” What happened to Bush’s promise and the Republican Party’s position on climate change?

Simply put, after the election, fossil fuel interests, the auto industry, utility leaders, and others shut Bush down and that was the end of Republican Whitehouse leadership on climate change.

These industries have manipulated the public and prevented lawmakers from enacting responsible climate and environmental statutes. Fossil fuel money is not just stopping progress on environmental protection but also thwarting urgently needed actions to save Earth’s life.

In the 2020 election, greedy manipulators misled low-information, mostly highschool educated male voters into believing that Joe Biden will end fracking in Pennsylvania. They activated resentful white male voters in Pennsylvania by clipping Biden’s statement during the primary, indicating that he will not lease any more western Federal lands for fracking. Taking words out of context is a pretext. Witnessing repeated dark-money-funded America First Action’s ads in recent weeks, it is easy to see how deceptive anti-environmental forces are well-funded and effective messengers.

Informed voters are critical for a viable democracy and climate solutions to protect clean air, pure water and conserve nature. The combined forces of fossil fuel and libertarian-moneyed interests have robbed our democracy of its essence and dragged planetary security down in its undertow.

To maintain their monopolistic grip on our energy source, preventing clean energy, the major oil/gas companies give money to lawmakers to maintain a salubrious U.S. energy subsidy policy that tilts the entire playing field to their benefit. A recent International Monetary Fund study found \$5.2 trillion in fossil fuel subsidies in 2017. The equivalent of over 6.5% of the global GDP and a half-trillion-dollar increase since 2015. James Ellsmoor writing for Forbes, explained, “The study includes the negative externalities caused by fossil fuels that society has to pay for, not reflected in their actual costs. In addition to direct transfers of government money to fossil fuel companies, this includes the indirect costs of pollution, such as healthcare costs and climate change adaptation. By including these numbers, the true cost of fossil fuel use to society is reflected.”

Big oil, coal, and frack gas interests have played a central role in distorting American politics for decades through the flow of fossil fuel money to candidates directly, through super PACs, and through fabricated entities with benign-sounding names that distract voters and distort science.

They have taken advantage of unrestricted expenditures for deception through misleading and often fraudulent advertising that promoted clean coal, mythical carbon capture, and various other diversions. They have been rewarded for their annual billion-dollar investments when elected officials gauge their support or rejection of legislation based on their donors-not on science or their voters-regardless of how it affects America's economic or ecological viability.

The fossil fuel industry's elaborate control over the American political apparatus has stifled all efforts to control carbon pollution. While those of us in the environmental movement have been upfront about our efforts to protect human health, the natural environment, and end carbon pollution, they were making big plans behind the corporate curtains to subdue the political apparatus. Now that the curtain is pulled back, we can see how they have been rewiring our electoral system to control the outcome of climate change policies, fish and wildlife conservation, and other environmental threats.

Democracy is a fragile thing. Graft and corruption are not new; The fossil fuel industry presents enormous national economic and security risks. Supporters of dirty fuels face fundamental moral and ethical compromises, and their continued support of climate-denying lawmakers is forcing incalculable ecological damage to the entire planet. The erosion of democracy, violations of the emoluments clause, and the dramatic spike in graft and corruption have caused the U.S. to plunge six places to 22nd on the global corruption index in 2018, according to Transparency International. Influence peddling should sober every American who loves democracy and is concerned with the viability of our planet.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assessment does not mince words about the state of our planet. We must act now to achieve global change at a scale that has "no documented historical precedent" to avoid the climate catastrophe that would result from a 2 degree C rise in average global temperature."

To avoid the most catastrophic impacts, we must keep fossil fuels in the ground. To do that, we must rapidly shift public and private investments away from tar sands, frack-gas, and shale oil towards sustainable energy solutions for all. We are past the point where we can rescue summer Arctic ice or avoid destructive consequences of fierce storms, excessive rainfall, mega-fires, extreme droughts, and flooded streets from sea-level rise.

Hopefully, we are not beyond a complete runaway climate system. We cannot be sure. We must now adapt to the climate disruptions we cannot avoid. While doing everything possible to prevent the utter calamity that will befall our children and their children, we must pursue an aggressive pollution control strategy.