



## Paris Accord: A toothless deal of key to our future?

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November 19, 2017

Two experts on the Paris Climate Accord differ on the impact of President Trump's decision to withdraw from it, but they do agree the United States should enact a carbon tax.

Presenting Monday at a Hiram College symposium, "If Not the Paris Accord, Then What?" were Jerry Taylor, president of a Washington think-tank called the Niskanen Center, and Jonathan Adler, an expert on environmental law and the director of the Center for Business Law and Regulation at the Case Western Reserve University School of Law in Cleveland.

The symposium was sponsored by the Hiram College's Garfield Center for Public Leadership. Taylor called the president's decision to walk away from the Paris Accord immoral and pointed out the pact is the first time virtually all the world's nations have agreed on the danger global warming represents.

Adler differed. He said the president's abandonment of the Paris Climate Accord was a recognition that the agreement has no enforcement mechanisms and that it could be economically bad for the United States. Together, China and the United States account for nearly 40 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions.

A self-described libertarian, Taylor was employed for 23 years with the CATO Institute, a conservative think-tank. He left in 2014 to found the Niskanen Center after the CATO Institute came under the control of the Koch brothers, billionaires ideologically opposed to taxes, which they see as creeping socialism.

Taylor told his audience Monday that he is a late-comer to accepting the idea that global warming is a clear and present danger. During his years at the CATO Institute, he argued against its urgency. He said predictions by James Hansen, a former NASA physicist now with Columbia University, convinced him that man-made carbon dioxide emissions are responsible for the earth's rapid warming and threaten humanity's well-being.

The "America First" position taken by President Trump, he said, shirks responsibility for doing what we can to save the planet. He said a minority of Republicans want the United States to take a leadership role in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, but have not yet convinced the party's majority.

Adler told the audience that he too believes man-made carbon dioxide emissions are a problem, but he likened the Paris Climate Accord to a lip service approach. Each nation set its own goals and attainment schedule and no way exists to enforce the accord, he said. Criticizing the Paris

Accord as overly broad, he said environmental agreements do better when they are more narrowly focused. Adler cited as an example the 1987 Montreal Protocol by which nations agreed to ban the use of coolants like chlorofluorocarbons that deplete the earth's ozone layer in the atmosphere that shields human beings from the sun's deadly radiation.

"They knew we had workable alternatives so it was easier to achieve and enforce a global consensus," he said.

Because President Obama committed America's support, the U.S. legally cannot withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord until November of 2020.

"By then," Adler said, President Trump, "could change his mind."

Both men agreed a carbon tax would be the most effective way for the United States to combat climate change. The tax is easy to impose on those who drill for oil or gas and those who mine coal, they said, adding that a carbon tax could also be extended to non-domestic producers when they sell to the United States.

Taylor said giant energy companies like BP and Exxon would accept a carbon tax because they are big enough to control market prices. Opposition to the carbon tax rests with Tea Party anti-taxation advocates like the Koch brothers and with the smaller, independent energy companies that are financially less secure than the giants, he said.

Both men said a carbon tax could enable the entrepreneurial genius of the free market to find the best alternatives to carbon-based fuels. Private investors taking on the risk of failure in the free market would arrive at the right solutions more quickly than a government bureaucracy trying to dictate a solution, they said.