



Time to fess up and walk back our Paris pledge

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At last December’s UN climate conference, President Obama **pledged** that the US would slash its greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28 percent between 2005 and 2025. Since then, harsh realities have conspired against him, making that target infeasible if not downright impossible. Rather than pay the rest of the world to look the other way, the president should revise, or better yet, rescind that promise.

And now is the time to do that, before the grand signing **ceremony** of the Paris Climate Agreement that is scheduled for April 22, Earth Day, at the UN’s New York headquarters. Putting our name on a promise that we know we can’t keep would be a disingenuous act, painting the Paris Agreement not as a serious undertaking, but as a global publicity stunt.

It’s becoming all too clear that what the president was peddling at the UN climate conference—his leadership in producing great strides in reducing US GHG emissions and a laying the groundwork for a series of ever-more stringent policies going forward—was a bill of goods.

Consider his boasting that “[o]ver the last seven years, we’ve made...ambitious reductions in our carbon emissions.” Turns out that **new scientific findings** indicate that the EPA has been underestimating U.S. emissions of the powerful greenhouse gas methane, so much so that whereas the EPA has been reporting a decline in methane emissions over the past decade, observations indicate a sharp rise. The EPA has now admitted that its past estimates were too low and is in the process of trying to fix them. Taking into account the new scientific findings, the recent decline in overall US greenhouse gas emissions highlighted by the president is **lessened by nearly one-third**—with **much** of what remains a result of the Great Recession and natural gas replacing coal in power generation, not Obama’s climate policies.

Or consider that the president told the UN assembly that “we’ve said yes to the first-ever set of national standards limiting the amount of carbon pollution our power plants can release into the sky” all the while knowing that virtually every analyst who had looked at the EPA’s Clean Power Plan knew that it **stretched** elements of the Clean Air Act to the point of breaking and was going to face a stiff, uphill legal battle. Barely two months later, the Supreme Court stayed the Clean Power Plan pending the outcome of the challenges. Even including the greenhouse gas

reductions promised by the Clean Power Plan the path to Obama's Paris pledge was uncertain, without it, there is **no chance**.

But that doesn't keep the Obama administration from trying to make it seem otherwise. What it can't achieve through emissions reductions, it is attempting to achieve through creative accounting. In the State Department's **Second Biennial Report Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**, the Obama administration significantly **increased** its estimates of how much carbon dioxide US forests were expected to uptake over the next 10 years. In its "optimistic" scenario, the one which gets closest to, but still doesn't quite reach its Paris goals, the State Department projects the US forest carbon dioxide sink will expand by more than 33 percent. This seems highly implausible, considering the over the past 10 years, the US carbon sink has actually declined a small amount. But, by projecting the sink to change course and expand considerably, it reduces the pressure for Obama to find more emissions reductions, and thereby makes his emissions targets easier to reach.

Put it all together—a smaller observed decline in greenhouse gas emissions, a roadblock to additional emissions reductions going forward, overly optimistic expectations—and add in cheap gas (more driving) and a growing economy that's still tightly tied to fossil fuel use, and you are left with the stark realization that we are not going to come close to meeting the pledges Obama made to the international community in Paris last year.

The one promise, though, that the president has been able to keep, is his pledge to fund the UN.'s Green Climate Fund. Last week he **handed over** \$500 million dollars to the Fund to show that "that the United States stands squarely behind our international climate commitments." Perhaps that'll be enough hush money to keep the rest of the world from complaining too loudly that the U.S. is overpromising its emissions commitments.

A successful signing day in New York this April will be a clear indication that the money transfer component of the Paris Agreement is more important than the climate change mitigation component. For those on the receiving end of this arrangement, this may be a good deal, but for us on the other end, we're paying a lot, accomplishing little, and hoping to get kudos for "doing something." Let's just end the charade and say no to signing the Paris Climate Agreement.

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