



No, Paris Exit Won't Kill America's Green Jobs

Experts dismiss hysterical predictions of U.S. falling behind on alternative energy technology

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Gloom-and-doom predictions about President Donald Trump's *decision to pull out* of the Paris climate accord vastly overstate the risk to America's burgeoning green energy industry, according to experts on the economy and environment.

Trump's critics on the Left howled loudly, painting a picture of America getting left behind as countries race to develop solar panels and wind turbines to meet the energy demands of governments trying to reduce carbon emissions.

Greg Stanko, a senior partner at Mitchell Point Communications who has done extensive work for alternative energy companies, said the fear is that the Paris withdrawal will stall the momentum to reduce the country's use of fossil fuels. That, in turn, could reduce job growth. But he said he is more optimistic.

"I don't honestly think that that's going to happen," he told LifeZette. "I think the renewable industry has done a pretty good job of convincing middle America that it can do as good a job of providing energy cheaply ... There's not going to be as many job losses as people say."

Stanko said most states, even Republican-leaning ones, mandate that a certain percentage of electricity come from clean-energy sources. This is not likely to change just because the United States is not part of the Paris accord, he said.

The agreement, negotiated in 2015 by almost 200 countries, makes very few enforceable demands. The countries committed to a goal of holding global temperature increases to less than 2 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. It also would have committed the United States and other rich nations to pay into a United Nations fund to compensate developing nations for switching to more expensive forms of energy.

Tom Richard, managing editor of Climate Change Dispatch, said leaving the pact likely will have little practical impact on alternative energy producers.

"It's symbolic," he said. "It was going to be expensive only because we would be obligated to pay billions of dollars to the UN."

'Free Markets Are Efficient'

Patrick Michaels, director of the Center of Study of Science at the libertarian Cato Institute, said global demand for American energy products should remain as strong as ever. He noted that

Germany, in an overreaction to the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan in 2011, shut down its own nuclear industry and found itself with power shortages.

The country then built six new coal plants and restarted others that had been mothballed.

“We are probably going to help the Europeans meet their goals by selling them natural gas and maybe even helping them build natural gas plants,” he said. “Free markets are efficient.”

Michaels said leaving the Paris accord — and dropping the Clean Power Plan that former President Barack Obama pushed to meet the accord’s goals — may actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That is because power companies will not have to use as much solar, wind and “inefficient, unreliable sources like that” and instead can use more natural gas, he said.

Michaels said natural gas, the cleanest of the fossil fuels, will allow firms to more rapidly reduce coal usage.

“Our emissions will actually drop more rapidly than it would have under Paris,” he said. “I’m pretty darn sure we’re going to be leaders in [reducing] global emissions when all is said and done.”

Todd Myers, director of the Center for the Environment at the Washington Policy Center, said the fact that solar and wind companies are adding more jobs than traditional energy companies is partly because it takes more workers to produce the same amount of electricity. As an analogy, he said that a country wanting to create agriculture jobs could ban tractors. That would produce more farmers but not benefit the economy overall, he said.

“Counting jobs is not always the best measure of economic effectiveness,” he said.

Green Policies Don’t Guarantee Jobs

Myers said nurturing green industries involves many more factors than local environmental policies. He noted that then-candidate Barack Obama in 2007 touted Spain’s drive to create green energy jobs. But that did not stop the Spanish unemployment rate from skyrocketing from about 8 percent to 25 percent after the global recession hit the following year.

Closer to home, Myers said, Oregon has passed laws to promote alternative energy usage. Yet it has lost green energy jobs in recent years while Texas has added them, he said.

“Being the greenest doesn’t mean you get the most jobs,” he said. “I don’t think that being part of the [Paris] agreement ensures you’ll have green jobs.”

Stanko, the public relations executive, said solar companies are close to being able to compete in a level playing field. He said companies are planning under the assumption that current subsidies will not be extended.

"This is the last time they're going to be able to come to the trough," he said.

But Myers said solar power is not yet ready. He said the government should repeal all subsidies, which he argued distort the market. He said new technology can develop without them, citing cell phones as an example.

"The politicians want to take credit [for] cool environmental solutions," he said.

Not only do subsidies tilt the playing field against existing technologies that do not receive them, Myers said, but they also make it harder for brand-new technologies to gain a foothold. Subsidizing wind and solar may make it harder for a breakthrough in nuclear fusion or some undreamed-of power source.

"You not only have to have a good idea," he said. "You also need to have a good lobbyist."