



EPA reportedly helped Paris agreement opponents place op-eds in newspapers

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News outlets reported that Trump has decided to leave the Paris agreement; Trump promised to announce his decision this afternoon

Trump plans to decide whether to remain in the climate pact in the coming days. Axios and The New York Times both reported on May 31 that President Donald Trump is expected to pull out of the Paris agreement, according to sources with knowledge of the decision. Trump subsequently tweeted on May 31 that he would announce his decision on the Paris accord this afternoon at the White House Rose Garden. The agreement, reached in December 2015, brought nearly 200 nations together in a pledge to fight climate change and curb their greenhouse gas emissions. [Axios.com, 5/31/17; The New York Times, 5/31/17; Twitter.com, 5/31/17]

Paris agreement opponents publishing deceptive op-eds may have been assisted by Scott Pruitt's EPA

EPA is "quietly working" to help right-wing activists publish op-eds arguing that Trump should take the U.S. out of the Paris agreement. As Axios reported, "Pruitt told aides he wanted them to pump the brakes on publicly lobbying for withdrawal from Paris. Instead, the EPA staff are quietly working with outside supporters to place op eds favoring withdrawal from Paris." [Axios.com, 5/28/17]

Misleading op-eds have appeared in multiple newspapers in recent weeks. Media Matters identified five anti-Paris agreement op-eds featuring misinformation about the agreement and climate change that were published in newspapers in recent weeks, including some that were syndicated and appeared in multiple outlets. Papers publishing the op-eds included The Washington Times, the Boston Herald, USA Today, The News Journal, The Jackson Sun, and The Hill. [The Washington Times, 5/15/17; Boston Herald, 5/22/17; USA Today, 5/23/17; The News Journal, 5/23/17; The Jackson Sun, 5/24/17; The Hill, 5/25/17]

Right-wing op-eds pushed false claim that Paris agreement would be economically disastrous

Conservative op-ed writers falsely claimed that the Paris accord would impose massive costs on U.S. businesses and families. In an opinion piece in The Washington Times, Ed Feulner, president of the Heritage Foundation, argued that the U.S. should withdraw from the agreement, adding, "As economist Nicolas Loris and U.N. expert Brett Schaefer recently noted, 'The U.S.

regulations alone would increase energy costs for U.S. families and businesses, causing an overall average shortfall of nearly 400,000 jobs and total income loss of more than \$20,000 for a family of four by the year 2035.” The figures were based on a 2016 Heritage Foundation report that claimed former President Obama's keystone policy for meeting Paris obligations, the Clean Power Plan, would cause an “aggregate gross domestic product (GDP) loss of over \$2.5 trillion” by 2035. And Loris, who also works for the Heritage Foundation, penned his own opinion piece in the Boston Herald claiming, “Compliance with the Paris agreement will cost the global economy trillions of dollars over the next 80 years.” [The Washington Times, 5/15/17; Heritage.org, 4/13/16; Boston Herald, 5/22/17]

Other studies have concluded that the Clean Power Plan would produce net economic growth. PolitiFact rated as “False” a Trump statement that was partly based on Heritage’s claim that the Clean Power Plan would reduce U.S. GDP by \$2.5 trillion. The fact-checking website noted that other analyses, including one written by Harvard researchers and published in a peer-reviewed journal, found that the plan would have a multibillion-dollar net-positive effect on GDP. [PolitiFact, 9/27/16; PLOS One, 6/7/17]

A Citi study found that it is not addressing climate change that would be extremely costly. A study by financial institution Citi found that unchecked climate change could cost up to \$72 trillion in global GDP and that moving to a low-carbon economy would be approximately \$2 trillion cheaper than not doing so. From Harvard Business Review:

Estimates of climate risk in the trillions are unfortunately getting more common. [In 2015], Citi produced a powerful study of the costs and benefits of shifting the energy system toward low-carbon technologies. Unchecked climate change, Citi said, could cost the world \$72 trillion by the middle of the century. But the big surprise in Citi’s report was the cost of building the low-carbon economy: the world can spend \$2 trillion less in total on energy infrastructure and ongoing fuel costs than it would in the business-as-usual scenario. So we save \$2 trillion and avoid losing up to \$72 trillion in economic activity. [Harvard Business Review, 4/1/16; Citi.com, August 2015]

Transitioning to a clean energy economy in line with Paris obligations would fuel economic growth and stimulate job creation. A report published this year by the International Energy Agency and the International Renewable Energy Agency found that transforming the global energy system to line up with the goals of the Paris agreement “can fuel economic growth and create new employment opportunities” in energy and other sectors:

The energy transition can fuel economic growth and create new employment opportunities.

Global GDP will be boosted around 0.8% in 2050 (USD 1.6 trillion). The cumulative gain through increased GDP from now to 2050 will amount to USD 19 trillion. Increased economic growth is driven by the investment stimulus and by enhanced pro-growth policies, in particular the use of carbon pricing and recycling of proceeds to lower income taxes. In a worst-case scenario (full crowding out of capital), GDP impacts are smaller (sic) but still positive (0.6%) since the effect of pro-growth policies remains favourable. Important structural economic changes will take place. While fossil fuel industries will incur the largest reductions in sectoral

output, those related to capital goods, services and bioenergy will experience the highest increases. The energy sector (including energy efficiency) will create around six million additional jobs in 2050. Job losses in fossil fuel industry would be fully offset by new jobs in renewables, with more jobs being created by energy efficiency activities. The overall GDP improvement will induce further job creation in other economic sectors. [IRENA.org, March 2017]

Big businesses have strongly lobbied the Trump administration to stay in the Paris accord. Despite right-wing claims that adhering to the Paris climate agreement would bring economic disaster, hundreds of major U.S. businesses have urged the Trump administration to stick to the climate deal. From CNN Money:

If Trump bails on the agreement, which has been signed by 195 countries, he will do so over the objections of hundreds of major U.S. businesses.

In recent months, big business has lobbied fiercely in favor of the deal, which aims to end the fossil fuel era. Even major oil firms like Chevron (CVX) and ExxonMobil (XOM) back it.

Exxon CEO Darren Woods wrote a personal letter to Trump earlier this month, urging him to stick to the deal. The U.S., he said, is "well positioned to compete" with the agreement in place and staying in means "a seat at the negotiating table to ensure a level playing field."

It might appear to be a strange move for energy firms, but many like the agreement because it favors natural gas (which they produce) over dirtier coal.

It's more than just energy firms, though: Microsoft (MSFT, Tech30), Apple (AAPL, Tech30), Starbucks (SBUX), Gap (GPS), Nike (NKE), Google (GOOGL, Tech30), Adidas (ADDYY) and L'Oreal (LRLCY) all support continued U.S. involvement.

Business leaders say the Paris deal, also called COP21, will help generate new jobs, limit damage from climate change and help assert American leadership on the global stage.[CNN Money, 5/29/17; Media Matters, 5/31/17]

Conservative op-eds argued wrongly that China and India are not taking action

Right-wing op-eds falsely claimed that China, India, and other developing nations were not committed to Paris goals. In a syndicated column that appeared in USA Today and USA Today Network newspapers, Phil Kerpen, president of American Commitment and a former vice president of Americans for Prosperity, wrote, "The Paris treaty effectively bans coal-fired power plants in the United States — while China has 368 coal plants under construction and more than 800 in the planning stage. India's coal production under the deal is allowed to double by 2020 — and they are likely to have emissions much higher than what they promised." And in his anti-Paris op-ed in the Boston Herald, Loris wrote, "Developing nations want affordable, dependable energy to raise their standards of living, and countries such as India, China and Indonesia need to use a lot of coal to get there." [USA Today, 5/23/17; The News Journal, 5/23/17; DelmarvaNow, 5/23/17; The Jackson Sun, 5/24/17; Boston Herald, 5/22/17]

China and India are on pace to meet their emissions targets ahead of schedule. The Washington Post recently reported that an analysis conducted by the Climate Action Tracker found that “China and India are on track to overachieve on their climate pledges” and quoted Bill Hare, CEO of the nonprofit science and policy institute Climate Analytics, saying that China and India “are going to slow the global growth in CO2 emissions significantly.” A New York Times editorial discussing the same analysis noted, “The shift from fossil fuels has ... been much faster and more pronounced than most experts expected. China has reduced coal use for three years in a row and recently scrapped plans to build more than 100 coal power plants. Indian officials have estimated that country might no longer need to build new coal plants beyond those that are already under construction.” [The Washington Post, 5/15/17; The New York Times, 5/22/17]

China and India are taking big steps to develop clean energy and scale back coal plants. In January of this year, China announced that it plans to spend more than \$360 billion through 2020 on renewable energy sources and is canceling plans to build more than 100 coal-fired power plants. Last year, India announced that it plans to get 57 percent of its total electricity capacity from renewable sources by 2027 and launch a \$2 billion equity fund to boost renewable energy development. According to The Associated Press, a March report by the groups CoalSwarm, the Sierra Club, and Greenpeace found that “construction starts for coal-fired plants in China and India were down by 62 percent in January from a year earlier while new facilities starting operation declined 29 percent.” Additionally, a May 22 New York Times editorial noted, “Electric vehicle sales in China jumped 70 percent last year, thanks in large part to generous government incentives. India is much further behind in this area, but the country’s minister of power said last month that all cars sold in the country should be electric by 2030. [The New York Times, 1/5/17, 1/18/17, 5/22/17; The Guardian, 12/22/16; CleanTechnica, 11/17/16; The Associated Press, 3/22/17]

Developing nations pushed for a strong Paris agreement and were “crucial” to its adoption. Developing countries, including the least developed countries, were a key part of the “high ambition coalition” that called for tougher climate change policies and “was widely credited with ensuring the Paris meeting ended in agreement,” according to Climate Change News. Far from pushing for a weak agreement and wanting leeway to burn coal, the developing nations have been insistent on the need for fast action to deal with climate change, and have sounded alarms about the role of corporations and lobbyists in UN climate negotiations, fearing that they might weaken emissions goals. [Climate Change News, 7/22/16; The New Yorker, 12/15/15; The New York Times, 5/16/17]

Developing nations committed to cutting emissions even though it's more difficult for them and they have less responsibility to do so. The world's developing countries have emitted only a small proportion of the climate-warming gases that humans have sent into the atmosphere over the past 160 years, and so they're responsible for only a small proportion of the global warming the world is experiencing. And yet all but two of the world's developing nations signed onto the Paris agreement and submitted action plans, many of which experts said were ambitious. Yet developing countries face a tougher challenge reducing emissions than their wealthier counterparts do. As Robert Lempert of the RAND Corporation explained to the Chicago

Tribune, “The richest countries have much of their economy in lower-emitting sectors. ... The U.S. can grow their economy and improve their quality of life without increasing energy use. But in developing countries, you can't do that.” [WRI.org, 11/25/14; Earth Island Journal, 7/1/15; Chicago Tribune, 5/16/17]

Op-eds against the agreement pushed climate science denial

Anti-Paris agreement op-eds spread climate science misinformation. In an op-ed for The Washington Times, Princeton emeritus physics professor and climate denier William Happer wrote that the U.S. “should withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement,” claiming, “For too long, well-meaning policymakers have been misled by propaganda, masquerading as science, that more atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) will harm the planet. ... More CO₂ is not a pollutant but is a benefit to humanity.” In an op-ed in The Hill, Patrick J. Michaels of the Cato Institute attempted to undermine the scientific rationale behind the Paris agreement by disputing that human activity is the dominant cause of recent global warming. [The Washington Times, 5/23/17; The Hill, 5/25/17]

Slate’s Phil Plait: Claiming CO₂ is not a pollutant is “ridiculous” and “in-your-face wrong.” In a February 18 column, science journalist Phil Plait wrote in Slate that the frequently used climate-denier claim that CO₂ is not a pollutant is “ridiculous,” “in-your-face wrong,” and a “typical denier distraction technique, trying to downplay or distract you from what's really going on.” He summarized the overwhelming scientific consensus: While some carbon dioxide is necessary for plant life, burning fossil fuels and thus releasing excess carbon dioxide into the atmosphere is warming up the globe “too quickly for many living things to adapt.” Carbon pollution is causing rapid changes to the Earth's climate, and, as Plait explained, that speed is the “danger; the rate at which we are heating the planet is unprecedented.” [Media Matters, 2/19/16]

Humans are “by far” the dominant cause of global warming. InsideClimate News reported in 2016 that “ninety to 100 percent of climate scientists agree that the planet is warming due to human activity, according to a peer-reviewed paper published Wednesday in the journal Environmental Research Letters. The study, called a ‘consensus on consensus’ synthesizes findings from prior published research.” In 2013, the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported, “It is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.” The IPCC defines “extremely likely” as having 95 to 100 percent probability. A 2009 letter signed by 18 U.S. scientific organizations stated that “greenhouse gases emitted by human activities are the primary driver” of climate change. In a 2012 literature review for the blog Skeptical Science, Dana Nuccitelli laid out the overwhelming evidence that humans are the primary driver of climate change, writing, “A wide variety of statistical and physical approaches all arrived at the same conclusion: that humans are the dominant cause of the global warming over the past century, and particularly over the past 50 years. This robust scientific evidence is why there is a consensus among scientific experts that humans are the dominant cause of global warming.” [InsideClimate News, 4/14/16; Media Matters, 4/29/17; American Association for the Advancement of Science, 10/21/09; Skeptical Science, 1/20/12]