

# White House divided on future of Paris climate agreement

Daniel de Vries  
19 April 2017

Debate is raging within the Trump administration over whether to carry through on the president's campaign promise to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate change accord. Both camps are offering reactionary prescriptions in order to ensure that immediate corporate profit interests remain unimpeded by any genuine effort to confront the potentially catastrophic impact of climate change.

Trump aides abruptly canceled a meeting of top advisors scheduled for Tuesday, at which officials hoped to arrive at a consensus approach toward the Paris accord. Trump will reportedly decide the future of US involvement in the pact in advance of next month's G7 summit in Italy.

The Paris agreement, inked in December 2015, requires the more than 190 signatory countries to submit voluntary goals for slowing the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Defenders of the pact often hail it as the capstone achievement of Barack Obama's environmental agenda. French President Francois Hollande at the time called it "a major leap for mankind," while former prime minister of Britain David Cameron triumphantly proclaimed, "We've secured our planet for many, many generations to come."

Yet the discussions inside the Trump administration—led by a man who has tweeted that global warming is a concept "created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive"—explode that myth that Paris was any sort of landmark agreement to forestall climate change.

Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor, and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson are the leading voices advocating for the US to remain a party to the agreement. Tillerson, the former CEO of ExxonMobil, backed it during his confirmation hearing

in January, explaining, "We're better served by being at that table than by leaving that table."

Since then, a growing number of fossil fuel interests have entered the fray urging Trump to remain in Paris. Administration officials have met with many of the top energy companies and industry groups in recent weeks. Tillerson's successor at ExxonMobil, Darren Woods, signaled his support in February, calling the agreement "an effective framework for all countries to address rising emissions." Rival oil giants Shell and BP have also voiced support.

Likewise, three of the nation's top coal producers, Peabody, Arch and Cloud Peak, signaled their support for remaining in the agreement. They hope to use US involvement to support investments in coal technology, including the capture and storage of carbon emissions. The support from major coal, oil and gas conglomerates underscores that Paris is no threat to their profits, but rather insulates them and their sponsor governments from pressure for the far-reaching measures to cut emissions in line with the speed scientists warn is necessary to prevent catastrophe.

The "remain" strategy is coupled with a proposed weakening of the voluntary targets set by the Obama administration for greenhouse gas reductions. Obama pledged to achieve 26 to 28 percent reduction in 2025 compared to 2005 levels. Just three months into the Trump administration, many observers have given up hope that the US can meet even this extremely modest target.

There are no penalties embedded in the Paris agreement for revising or missing the goals set by each country. There is concern, however, that withdrawing from the agreement outright could enable countries that tax carbon pollution to place environmental tariffs on imports from the US.

Trump's chief strategist Steve Bannon and Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt have emerged as the most prominent opponents of the Paris accord within the administration. Pruitt remarked on Fox News last week, "It's a bad deal for America. It was an America second, third, or fourth kind of approach. China and India had no obligations under the agreement until 2030. We front-loaded all our costs."

Pruitt, who refuses to recognize that climate change is primarily driven by human activity, notably did not object to the nature of the agreement so much as a perceived disadvantage relative to potential competitors, especially China. This is, in fact, the main concern for both sides of the debate within the administration, and for that matter, the Democrats as well, despite differing conclusions.

The big energy companies are also not universal in their support for remaining in Paris. Harold Hamm, the billionaire CEO of hydro-fracking giant Continental Resources and link between Pruitt and Trump, bitterly opposes the climate agreement. A collection of ultra-right and libertarian think-tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and Americans for Prosperity, which Trump has relied upon thus far to formulate his environmental agenda, also oppose remaining.

Regardless of who wins the debate on the fate of US involvement in the Paris climate change agreement, the intent of the Trump administration is to further subordinate the interests of humanity to an increasingly reckless capitalist elite.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**