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Paris Climate Accord - Revisited

By Steve Bakke  December 22, 2020



It's time for Americans to reassess what we think about the Paris Climate Accord. We're faced with this as an issue because Joe Biden has committed to reenter that agreement the same day he's inaugurated. The agreement was signed by Barack Obama in 2016 as an executive agreement, not as a treaty, which made it easy for Trump to withdraw from it. For that same reason, it would take only a stroke of the pen for Biden to reenter the agreement. Trump announced the withdrawal about a year ago, and because of provisions in the agreement, it didn't become effective until November 4, 2020.

Critics of the agreement have numerous concerns. Here's a sampling:

- The Accord was intended to be a treaty, but the U.S. was an international outlier by not bringing it to the Senate for approval, as is constitutionally required for a treaty. Obama avoided taking it to the Senate because ratification was DOA.
- The U.S. already has a record of leading the world CO2 emission improvement, without signing any agreement. Being party to the agreement would do nothing to further our continued improvement, and it would hamper our ability to reach energy independence, so critical to our national security.
- The Accord requires voluntary obligations which are unenforceable. The U.S. is virtually the only country able to comply with any commitments they might make.
- The Accord would have us sacrificing our coal miners' jobs, while China and other participants could keep polluting while heavily relying on energy produced from coal.
- Finally, there's the pesky issue which critics refer to as the "slush fund requirement." This "wealth transfer" provision would require a significant U.S. contribution, eliminating the opportunity for the U.S. to employ those funds in their own "clean energy" research and development. Who better to do it?

The original intent of this agreement, according to President Obama was to "help delay or avoid some of the worst consequences of climate change." By the time Trump took office, the following claim was being made: "The primary goal of international climate change agreements is

international wealth distribution.” Was that claim mere speculation? Here’s a sampling of what I found by reviewing statements made by United Nations climate officials:

- “Isn’t the only hope for the planet that the industrial civilizations collapse? Isn’t it our responsibility to bring about?” – Maurice Strong, founder of the U.N. Eco-Summit and a former Undersecretary General.
- “Climate Policy has almost nothing to do anymore with environmental protection.....One must say clearly that we redistribute the world’s wealth by climate policy.....” – Ottmar Edenhofer, Co-chair of the U.N.’s IPCC climate change working group from 2008 to 2015.
- “This has almost nothing to do with the environmental policy anymore.....We distribute de facto the world’s wealth by climate policy.” – Edenhofer.
- “.....in order to get rich, one has to burn coal, oil or gas.” – Edenhofer once again, this time explaining why the Paris Accord would allow Third World countries to emit as much CO2 as they choose while restricting developed countries’ emissions.

Operating outside of the agreement preserves our sovereignty for establishing our own environmental priorities. And it permits us to independently lead research and development consistent with our own priorities such as national security. Countries around the world are looking forward to Biden rejoining the agreement. Their motivation is that we would then be paying the bills.

Our relationship with China has undergone a much-needed reality check since the original signing of the Accord. And China is a major participant in the agreement. China emits double the CO2 compared with the U.S., and their emissions increased 353% from 1990 to 2017, while U.S. emissions reduced by 0.4%. Yet, they would be held to a looser standard than would the U.S. Trusting China to meet any commitment under the agreement would be like believing their reports about their involvement in the COVID pandemic, or like living up to its treaty regarding treatment of Hong Kong.

Finally, worldwide CO2 emission reduction is best served by heavy dependence on clean natural gas and by exploiting the full potential for nuclear energy. The ideology of the Accord wouldn’t bode well for either one. We should pursue nuclear and natural gas energy development on our own.