

**Statement of the Honorable John F. Kerry
Presidential Special Envoy for Climate
U.S. Department of State
Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee
May 12, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Meeks, Ranking Member McCaul, and distinguished Members of the Committee. It is my pleasure to appear before the committee today to discuss the Biden Administration's international climate agenda.

During his campaign, President Biden identified climate change as one of the four “historic crises” facing our country, alongside COVID-19, the economic crisis, and racial inequality.

He was right to do so.

Everywhere across the United States and around the world, we’ve seen the mounting costs imposed by a warming and more volatile climate.

2020 set a new U.S. record of 22 weather and climate disasters costing over one billion dollars each. Last year’s tally of 22 hurricanes, floods, droughts, and wildfires shattered the previous annual record of 16 such events -- which was set only four years ago. These natural disasters have cost the US more than 1.79 trillion dollars since 1980.

The 2020 U.S. wildfire season burned more than 10 million acres -- an area greater than the state of Maryland. We saw five of the six biggest wildfires in California’s history last year, as well as the single largest wildfire in Colorado’s history.

2020 was the warmest year on record. The last decade was the warmest decade on record.

For the first time in our country’s history, NOAA now considers Fairbanks, Alaska, a warm summer continental climate because -- for 4 months of the calendar year -- the average temperature is 50 degrees Fahrenheit or more.

As my friend Secretary Blinken noted recently, we’re fast running out of records to break.

And that's why I was so honored to be asked by President Biden to lead his all-out diplomatic effort to ensure that the United States is once again a global leader in combatting the climate crisis.

As the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, it's my job to make sure that the rest of the world sees that the United States is re-engaged, re-energized, and re-dedicated to tackling the climate crisis both at home and abroad.

In practice, that means marshalling all of our resources to ensure that we can keep a 1.5 degrees Celsius limit on warming within reach. Science tells us that beyond this point, the consequences are catastrophic.

Unless emissions targets across the world are enhanced and implemented, we are headed into a dangerous world above 3 degrees Celsius of warming.

Keeping 1.5 degrees alive is our north star over the months to come. But achieving that goal will mean bending the emissions curve downward substantially by 2030 – making this the “decisive decade” in the climate fight. At home that entails a whole-of-government, interagency effort to which my colleagues across the administration are now dedicated, including my good friend, National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy. The stakes here are serious. Communities that have contributed the least to the climate crisis — which are historically marginalized — are projected to disproportionately bear its costs and are already feeling its impacts.

The U.S. is contributing a declining share of global annual emissions. The Biden Administration has made important and measurable strides in our first weeks. At the president's landmark 100-days Climate Leaders Summit on April 22nd and 23rd, we put forward a very strong 2030 emission reduction target alongside ambitious new 2030 targets from Japan and Canada, steps by the EU to implement its 2030 target, and the UK's new pace-setting 2035 goal. America and many of its closest allies—a coalition accounting for more than half the global economy—are now clearly committed to climate technology leadership and the pace of emissions reductions required globally to keep a safer 1.5 degree Celsius future in reach. And we know that this coalition is growing, including South Korea's recent announcement that it will strengthen its 2030 target later this year.

And we were far from alone.

Argentina has updated its 2030 target and is ramping up renewables, including sourcing from U.S. suppliers. South Africa moved forward its peaking year by a full decade to 2025.

Additionally, the Chinese government committed to implement the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol to phase down HFCs and indicated that they will now “strictly control” coal-fired power generation projects, building on their 2020 commitment to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

There is much more to be done, in China and elsewhere, and we’re working with partner governments to secure enhanced action and additional pledges ahead of the COP26 global climate summit in November this year. But this represents a serious sprint in just our first 100 days in office.

I know today’s hearing is focused on our efforts abroad. But I also know that every member here today is deeply concerned with our economic health and prosperity here at home.

The fact is, addressing the climate crisis is integrally related to our economic recovery here in the U.S. It’s a huge opportunity for jobs, for new technology, and for our communities.

It’s a transition – no question. But we’ve been through transitions before. And just as America led the world in the industrial revolution – just as we led the technological revolution – we can and will lead the energy revolution. And just as we developed the lightbulb and the airplane – just as we developed the internet and vaccines that save millions of lives – we can and we will develop the battery storage technologies, the direct air capture technologies, the green hydrogen, and the smart-grid technologies that will change the world and stave off the catastrophic impacts of the climate crisis.

There are tough choices in politics – believe me. We all know that. But this isn’t one of them.

Because in addressing the climate crisis, we are actually taking advantage of the greatest economic opportunity the world has ever known.

Before the pandemic, two of the three fastest-growing jobs in the country were wind turbine technicians and solar photovoltaic (PV) installers. From 2017 to 2020, clean energy jobs grew by an average of 6 percent each year, faster than

fossil fuels and the rest of the energy economy, and about twice the pace of the U.S. economy as a whole. We now have more Americans working in clean energy—3 million—than we have bankers or middle and elementary school teachers.

Clean energy jobs outnumber fossil fuel jobs in the U.S. three-to-one. And it's broad-based, too: clean energy jobs outnumber fossil fuel jobs in 81 percent of rural counties.

And there's an even bigger growth opportunity for the U.S. in the years to come.

In 2020, global investment in clean technologies crossed the 500 billion dollar mark -- and the International Energy Agency predicts that clean technology investment opportunities could triple during this decade.

Solar and wind investment is forecasted to be five times larger than that for coal and gas-fired power plants through 2050. Similarly, the size of the global electric-vehicle fleet is expected to jump to 116 million in 2030, up from only 8.5 million in 2020.

Jobs and dollar figures alone don't tell the whole story.

We're also seeing that clean energy can power our homes and businesses. For a period on April 24th, California's electrical grid was powered by 95 percent renewable energy, without any loss in reliability or supply. Countries as diverse as Denmark, Ethiopia, and Slovakia now all power 80 percent or more of their grids with emissions-free generation.

We've also seen markets moving inexorably in the direction of clean energy and low-carbon solutions.

Ahead of the summit, that's why six leading U.S. banks pledged to mobilize 4.15 trillion dollars of low-carbon capital by 2030. America's three largest U.S. asset managers also announced that 19 trillion dollars in assets that they manage will be moved to low-carbon investments by 2050.

American automakers are positioning to lead the global electrical vehicle revolution.

The transformation I'm talking about isn't some future projection. It's happening here and now. It's a reality, as we speak.

The trajectory towards the new energy economy is now unmistakable in so many different sectors. As we saw over the last four years, much of that movement is irrespective of federal action – dollars are rapidly draining away from investments that don't fit squarely within that crucial 1.5 degree “pathway.”

Members of the Committee, there is so much progress being made already – and much more work ahead. As we move towards the COP26 global summit in Scotland this November, we are clear-eyed about the bold goals that we've set for ourselves. Our engagement is designed to help build out opportunities for our country. President Biden knows how important it is for the United States to join with nations around the world to meet the challenge of the climate crisis.

I served here on Capitol Hill for 28 years. I have always respected the oversight role of Congress. I have already had several productive exchanges with members of the committee, and I look forward to continuing those discussions in the months ahead. I welcome your guidance, feedback, and input as we work to implement this ambitious climate agenda.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.