



MEMORANDUM

February 26, 2019

To: Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Members and Staff

Fr: Committee on Energy and Commerce Staff

Re: Hearing on “We’ll Always Have Paris: Filling the Leadership Void Caused by Federal Inaction on Climate Change”

On **Thursday, February 28, 2019, at 10 a.m. in the John D. Dingell Room, 2123 of the Rayburn House Office Building**, the Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change will hold a hearing entitled “We’ll Always Have Paris: Filling the Leadership Void Caused by Federal Inaction on Climate Change.”

I. BACKGROUND

The Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted the Paris Agreement in December 2015, to limit global temperature rise to between 1.5 and two degrees Celsius (°C) above pre-industrial levels by 2100. The accord took effect in November 2016.

The Paris Agreement is the product of decades of negotiations under the UNFCCC. Adopted in 1992 (and ratified by the United States Senate that same year), the UNFCCC aims to “stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.”¹ The structure of the Paris Agreement also addresses two concerns about the earlier Kyoto Protocol: it requires all nations to take specific steps to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and it does not impose a uniform target or method for emissions reduction on all parties. Instead, the Paris Agreement established a bottom-up framework in which all parties submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) based on their unique circumstances and priorities.²

In its initial NDC, the United States pledged to reduce GHG emissions 26-28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. The NDC included adoption of more stringent fuel economy standards for light-duty and heavy-duty vehicles; new appliance efficiency standards and new model building codes; phase-out for hydrofluorocarbons; regulations to cut carbon emissions from new and existing power plants; and standards to control methane emissions from landfills and the oil and gas sector.

¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992).

² The Paris Agreement, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2015).

In June 2017, the Trump Administration announced its intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Subsequently, non-federal and non-governmental actors organized to address the threat of climate change in the absence of federal action.

II. CONTINUING CLIMATE ACTION IN THE UNITED STATES

As of February 2019, more than 3,600 subnational actors committed to upholding the Paris goals and signed the *We Are Still In* pledge. Together, they represent 154.3 million Americans and \$9.46 trillion in GDP.³ In September 2018, *America's Pledge* reported that 21 states, 142 cities and counties, 1,300 businesses, and hundreds of other organizations had made bold, quantifiable climate commitments. Together, these entities account for over one-third of domestic GHG emissions.⁴

States: To date, 21 states have joined the U.S. Climate Alliance, which is a bipartisan coalition of governors who are committed to upholding the Paris Agreement goals. Participating states agree to implement policies that reduce emissions and deploy clean energy technologies, as well as track and report progress towards meeting the Paris goals. The Alliance now represents more than 40 percent of the United States population, \$9 trillion in GDP, and 1.3 million clean energy jobs.⁵

Cities: Hundreds of cities and counties have committed to address climate change at the local level. Local governments can reduce emissions from municipal operations, amend zoning and building codes to promote sustainability and efficiency, modernize their local transportation systems, and, in some cases, decarbonize their energy supply. As of February 2019, more than 400 mayors had joined the Climate Mayors coalition, which aims to accelerate local climate action.⁶ Furthermore, 108 cities and 11 counties have committed to 100 percent clean energy.⁷

Businesses: More than 550 companies headquartered in the United States (with \$7.1 trillion in combined revenue) have made ambitious climate commitments, including pledges to reduce emissions, improve energy efficiency, power their facilities and operations with clean energy, and promote sustainability throughout their supply chains.⁸ That list includes nearly half of all

³ We Are Still In, Home (www.wearestillin.com) (accessed Feb. 19, 2019).

⁴ America's Pledge, *Fulfilling America's Pledge: How States, Cities and Businesses are Leading the United States to a Low-Carbon Future* (Sept. 28, 2018).

⁵ U.S. Climate Alliance, Home (www.usclimatealliance.org) (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

⁶ Climate Mayors, Home (www.climatemayors.org) (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

⁷ Sierra Club, 100% Commitments in Cities, Counties, & States (www.sierraclub.org/ready-for-100/commitments) (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

⁸ Data-Driven Yale, NewClimate Institute, and PBL Environmental Assessment Agency, *Global Climate Action from Cities, Regions, and Businesses: Individual Actors, Collective Initiatives and Their Impact on Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions* (Aug. 2018).

Fortune 500 companies and almost two-thirds of those in the Fortune 100.⁹ In addition, more than 100 of the country's largest companies have adopted science-based targets to reduce emissions in line with the latest climate science.¹⁰ Seventy-eight businesses (representing nearly 70 million megawatt-hours of electricity demand) have also signed the *Renewable Energy Buyers' Principles*, an initiative that aims to help businesses and utilities expand access to low-carbon electricity.¹¹ Similarly, 53 companies headquartered in the United States have committed to 100 percent clean energy.¹² Partly due to this commitment, corporate procurement of offsite renewable energy reached a record 6.53 gigawatts in 2018 alone.¹³ Finally, more than 300 investors managing \$32 trillion in assets have signed the *Climate Action 100+* pledge, which pushes companies to reduce emissions and disclose their climate vulnerabilities.¹⁴

III. CONSEQUENCES OF FEDERAL INACTION

The United States is now roughly halfway to meeting its 2025 emissions targets. Current policies and commitments would bring the United States approximately two-thirds of the way to its 2025 goal.¹⁵

Globally, subnational commitments together represent “a significant step forward” in meeting the Paris goals, but they are “not nearly enough” to limit temperature rise between 1.5°C and 2°C.¹⁶ Expert analysis of those commitments suggests subnational action is necessary but insufficient to avoid the worst climate change impacts. Only national engagement can help narrow the gap between the current emissions trajectory and the required reductions.

A February 2019 report by researchers at the World Resources Institute supports that assessment. Those researchers found that the international community must dramatically increase both the scale and scope of national climate action by 2020 to avoid the worst effects of

⁹ World Wildlife Fund, Ceres, Calvert Research and Management, and CDP, *Power Forward 3.0: How the largest U.S. companies are capturing business value while addressing climate change* (Apr. 25, 2017).

¹⁰ Science-Based Targets, Companies Taking Action (www.sciencebasedtargets.org/companies-taking-action) (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

¹¹ Corporate Renewable Energy Buyers' Principles, Eight Companies Sign on to Renewable Energy Buyers' Principles (www.buyersprinciples.org/2018/10/15/eight-companies-sign-on-to-renewable-energy-buyers-principles) (Oct. 15, 2018).

¹² We Mean Business, Companies (www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/companies) (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

¹³ Business Renewables Center (Rocky Mountain Institute), BRC Deal Tracker (www.businessrenewables.org/corporate-transactions) (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

¹⁴ Climate Action 100+, Global Investors Driving Business Transition (www.climateaction100.org) (accessed Feb. 21, 2019).

¹⁵ See note 5.

¹⁶ See note 9.

climate change. That analysis showed that “in most cases action is insufficient or progress is off track” to achieve the Paris goals, and that “[t]remendous opportunities to scale up and accelerate action remain untapped across all sectors” at both the national and subnational levels.¹⁷

IV. WITNESSES

The following witnesses have been invited to testify:

Andrew Light

Distinguished Senior Fellow
World Resource Institute

Carla Frisch

Principal
Rocky Mountain Institute

Nathan Hultman

Director, Center for Global Sustainability; Associate Professor
University of Maryland School of Public Policy

Sam Thernstrom

Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Energy Innovation Reform Project

¹⁷ World Resources Institute, *Tracking Progress of the 2020 Climate Turning Point* (Feb. 2019).