

Remarks on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change

October 5, 2016

Good afternoon, everybody. Today is a historic day in the fight to protect our planet for future generations.

Ten months ago, in Paris, I said before the world that we needed a strong global agreement to reduce carbon pollution and to set the world on a low-carbon course. The result was the Paris Agreement. Last month, the United States and China, the world's two largest economies and largest emitters, formally joined that agreement together. And today the world has officially crossed the threshold for the Paris Agreement to take effect.

Today the world meets the moment. And if we follow through on the commitments that this Paris Agreement embodies, history may well judge it as a turning point for our planet.

Of course, it took a long time to reach this day. One of the reasons I ran for this office was to make America a leader in this mission. And over the past 8 years, we've done just that. In 2009, we salvaged a chaotic climate summit in Copenhagen, establishing the principle that all nations have a role to play in combating climate change. And at home, we led by example, with historic investments in growing industries like wind and solar that created a steady stream of new jobs. We set the first-ever nationwide standards to limit the amount of carbon pollution that power plants can dump into the air our children breathe. From the cars and trucks we drive to the homes and businesses in which we live and work, we've changed, fundamentally, the way we consume energy.

Now, keep in mind, the skeptics said these actions would kill jobs. And instead, we saw, even as we were bringing down these carbon levels, the longest streak of job creation in American history. We drove economic output to new highs. And we drove our carbon pollution to its lowest levels in two decades.

We continued to lead by example with our historic joint announcement with China two years ago, where we put forward even more ambitious climate targets. And that achievement encouraged dozens of other countries to set more ambitious climate targets of their own. And that, in turn, paved the way for our success in Paris: the idea that no nation, not even one as powerful as ours, can solve this challenge alone. All of us have to solve it together.

Now, the Paris Agreement alone will not solve the climate crisis. Even if we meet every target embodied in the agreement, we'll only get to part of where we need to go. But make no mistake: This agreement will help delay or avoid some of the worst consequences of climate change. It will help other nations ratchet down their dangerous carbon emissions over time, and set bolder targets as technology advances, all under a strong system of transparency that allows each nation to evaluate the progress of all other nations. And by sending a signal that this is going to be our future—a clean energy future—it opens up the floodgates for businesses and scientists and engineers to unleash high-tech, low-carbon investment and innovation at a scale that we've never seen before. So this gives us the best possible shot to save the one planet we've got.

I know diplomacy can be [isn't always][°] easy and progress on the world stage can sometimes be slow. But together, with steady, persistent effort, with strong, principled American leadership, with optimism and faith and hope, we're proving that it is possible.

And I want to embarrass my Senior Adviser, Brian Deese, who is standing right over there, because he worked tirelessly to make this deal possible. He and John Kerry, Gina McCarthy at the EPA, everybody on their teams have done an extraordinary job to get us to this point, and America should be as proud of them as I am of them.

And I also want to thank the people of every nation that has moved quickly to bring the Paris Agreement into force. I encourage folks who have not yet submitted their documentation to enter into this agreement, to do so as soon as possible. And in the coming days, let's help finish additional agreements to limit aviation emissions, to phase down dangerous use of hydrofluorocarbons, all of which will help build a world that is safer and more prosperous and more secure and more free than the one that was left for us.

That's our most important mission: to make sure our kids and our grandkids have at least as beautiful a planet and, hopefully, even more beautiful, than the one that we had. And today I'm a little more confident that we can get the job done.

So thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

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[°] White House correction.