



Advancing the U.S. Nonfederal Movement to Support the Paris Agreement

Gwynne Taraska and Howard Marano November 6, 2017

Since the current U.S. administration announced its intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, state, local, and private-sector leaders across the United States have created a landscape of climate initiatives and alliances to demonstrate that the country remains largely committed to the global fight against climate change. To date, the U.S. nonfederal climate movement has focused on pledges to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions in an effort to support the Paris Agreement. Given that the movement represents a significant percentage of the U.S. economy and population, these pledges have provided international assurance that the second-largest emitter will continue its pivot toward clean energy—even as the White House pursues an anti-climate agenda. (see text box for a taxonomy of the U.S. nonfederal climate movement)

Supporting the Paris Agreement, however, entails more than promoting clean energy domestically—as important as that is—given that the agreement is a multifaceted pact to collectively curb the cause, adapt to the effects, and cope with the damage of climate change.³ If U.S. state and local governments and private-sector actors seek to comprehensively take up the mantle of U.S. leadership in the global climate effort, they should expand their focus to include not only domestic emissions reductions but also international assistance and cooperation. Specifically, they should seek to mobilize and provide finance to promote clean energy and climate preparedness in the most vulnerable developing countries, which is an essential pillar of the Paris Agreement.⁴ They should also participate in the international collaborations that spur more ambitious climate action.

In doing so, these state, city, and private-sector leaders would ultimately be benefiting their local economies and communities. From 2011 through 2017, extreme weather events in the United States alone have cost the country an estimated \$675 billion.⁵ Meanwhile, the food and water sectors illustrate how the physical effects of climate change anywhere in the world can have a cascade of destructive effects across the globe. Changes to the global food system could leave 1.7 billion additional people with

The 2017 U.N. Climate Change Conference

The countries that are parties to the Paris Agreement continue to meet—including in Bonn, Germany, from November 6 through November 17 for the 23rd Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change—to discuss the details of its implementation. The United States will participate in the negotiations, given that the country cannot formally withdraw until 2020.¹ A major part of the U.S. presence, however, will be nonfederal leaders voicing support for the pact and showcasing their climate actions.²

insufficient food by midcentury.⁶ Water resources are already under significant strain, with nearly one-quarter of the global population in countries with scarce supplies.⁷ These trends could increase social tension, conflict, displacement, and cross-border migration, with implications for global and national security.⁸

Taxonomy of the U.S. nonfederal climate movement

In recent months, nonfederal leaders have committed to work toward the goals of the Paris Agreement in unprecedented numbers.

The U.S. Climate Alliance

The U.S. Climate Alliance is a coalition of states and Puerto Rico that have pledged to reduce their collective emissions 26 percent to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025.⁹ Govs. Jerry Brown (D-CA), Jay Inslee (D-WA), and Andrew Cuomo (D-NY) launched the alliance, which now has 15 members.¹⁰ In September 2017, the U.S. Climate Alliance reported that it is on a trajectory to reduce emissions 24 percent to 29 percent below 2005 levels by 2025 based on current policies.¹¹ The alliance represents more than \$7 trillion of the U.S. economy and more than 36 percent of the U.S. population.

We Are Still In

We Are Still In is a cross-sectoral coalition of more than 2,500 U.S. states, cities, tribes, universities, and businesses that have pledged their support for climate action and the Paris Agreement.¹² The group represents more than \$6 trillion of the U.S. economy and more than 125 million people. It has signatories from all 50 states.

America's Pledge

America's Pledge is an initiative to quantify, aggregate, and communicate how nonfederal actors in the United States are pressing forward on climate action absent federal leadership.¹³ Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (I) and Gov. Brown launched the effort.

U.S. Climate Mayors

To date, more than 380 mayors from the U.S. Climate Mayors coalition—representing more than 65 million Americans across the country—have pledged to expand efforts to fight climate change and work toward the goals of the Paris Agreement.¹⁴

Global Climate Action Summit

The Global Climate Action Summit will showcase nonfederal climate leadership in September 2018—and will serve as an organizing date for U.S. nonfederal climate announcements and initiatives. Gov. Brown and former Mayor Bloomberg are among the co-chairs of the summit.¹⁵

Building a pillar on international climate finance

It will take a redirection of financial flows in the trillions of dollars to create a global low-carbon energy system and limit warming within 2 degrees Celsius over preindustrial levels.¹⁶ Finance is therefore a central component of the Paris Agreement.

The agreement also underlines the need to increase finance for climate resilience—which historically has trailed finance for clean energy by a large margin—and to focus on the most vulnerable blocs of countries, such as the Least Developed Countries and the Small Island Developing States.¹⁷ In addition, the Paris Agreement reaffirms the existing financial pledges of developed countries, such as the pledge of the 2009 Copenhagen Accord to collectively mobilize \$100 billion yearly by 2020 to help developing countries reduce emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change. The decision text that accompanies the Paris Agreement explicitly sustains this pledge through 2025.¹⁸

The U.S. nonfederal climate movement will therefore need to expand its mission to include the mobilization of international climate finance if it is to comprehensively support the Paris Agreement and serve as a proxy for U.S. climate leadership during the current administration. Moreover, it will need to have a significant focus on finance for climate preparedness in the most vulnerable developing countries.

As part of a finance pillar, the Center for American Progress and the World Resources Institute have proposed the creation of an American climate fund that could pool contributions from a variety of U.S. sources, including via crowdfunding, and disburse them to multilateral finance channels that have track records of helping the most vulnerable developing countries address climate change.¹⁹ The Adaptation Fund, for example, has a history of improving climate resilience, including food and water security, in high-risk regions.²⁰ One recent case is a \$6.8 million initiative launched in 2017 to help farmers in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda adapt to the effects of climate change, such as increasingly frequent and severe droughts, through training and projects such as roof-water harvesting and drip irrigation.²¹

Nonfederal leaders have already shown a desire to help mobilize climate finance to counter a White House that has targeted such finance for elimination in the federal budget. The Seattle City Council, for example, recognized finance as a necessary component of U.S. climate leadership in its resolution in support of the Paris Agreement.²² Subsequently, the Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment recommended that the city support the development of an American climate fund and engage the local community.

Other efforts are also seeking to ensure continued U.S. engagement in international climate finance. Massachusetts, for example, is considering legislation to add a checkoff option on the state tax return that would allow contributions to the Least Developed Countries Fund.²³ Meanwhile, CDP, an organization that helps subnational governments and businesses measure and disclose their effects on the climate, has launched a platform to help match investors with projects around the globe that promote climate-resilient infrastructure.²⁴ Together, such efforts—and others that are forthcoming—could form the basis of a finance pillar for the U.S. nonfederal climate movement.

Building a pillar on international climate cooperation

A complex set of bilateral and multilateral collaborations enabled the creation of the Paris Agreement. In the run-up to the 2015 summit in Paris, the U.S.-China joint announcement on climate change—which brought together the two largest economies and greenhouse gas emitters—precipitated a flood of climate pledges from other countries. Likewise, the so-called High-Ambition Coalition—an alliance of more than 100 developed and developing countries that includes the Marshall Islands, the countries of the European Union, and the members of the Least Developed Countries bloc, among others—was instrumental in ensuring the strength of the pact.

Similarly, international collaborations can now help enable the fulfilment of the Paris Agreement. The North American Leaders' Summit, for example, resulted in a trilateral climate partnership with goals to reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector 40 percent to 45 percent below 2012 levels and to reach 50 percent clean electricity generation across the continent, both by 2025.²⁵ Likewise, forums for economic governance such as the G-7 and G-20 can serve as avenues to prevent backsliding in the global climate effort.¹⁷ In the wake of the U.S. administration's withdrawal announcement, for example, the G-20 summit produced a unified statement of commitment to the Paris Agreement from the other 19 major economies.

Going forward, the U.S. nonfederal climate movement could be a formidable force in the landscape of international climate politics. The U.S. Climate Alliance alone—which represents nearly 40 percent of the U.S. economy—has significant latent diplomatic power.²⁷ It could help ensure, for example, that issues such as food and water security in the most vulnerable developing countries stay on the international agenda.

Further, nonfederal climate alliances could step into the vacuum of climate leadership at the national level in order to create, preserve, and advance international collaborations. The Center for American Progress and the World Resources Institute have recommended, for example, that North American state, city, and private-sector actors carry forward the effort to create a low-carbon and climate-resilient continent.²⁸ To that end, they have advocated for the creation of a North American climate alliance, with participation from nonfederal actors, as well as a summit that would include North American climate leaders from the private sector and all levels of government.

There is already a basis for ramped-up international climate diplomacy and cooperation from U.S. nonfederal climate leaders and the nascent U.S. climate coalitions. Gov. Inslee, for example, met with both Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau—notably, Canada will host the G-7 summit in 2018—just prior to the Paris withdrawal announcement to discuss policy issues of mutual concern, including clean energy and the effects of climate change.²⁹ In addition, long-standing

climate coalitions with U.S. city and state participation, such as the Under2 Memorandum of Understanding, could provide lessons learned for the U.S. nonfederal climate movement to engage internationally.³⁰

Conclusion

The U.S. nonfederal climate movement is now at a point where it could develop beyond its focus on domestic emissions reductions. Making international climate finance and cooperation dedicated pillars of its mission would allow it to more fully support the goals of the Paris Agreement.

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