

# Canadians shouldn't be smug about America's Paris accord retreat

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U.S. President Donald Trump announces his decision that the United States will withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, U.S., June 1, 2017. (Joshua Roberts/Reuters)

Donald Trump's announcement that the United States will withdraw from the Paris climate agreement has been met with understandable disdain from Canadians. And confronted by the increasingly divergent world views of the U.S. Republican and Democratic parties, many Canadians appear to be readily embracing the latter.

That divergence is on stark display when comparing the two U.S. parties' positions on the Paris Agreement and domestic climate policy. The Trump administration's "America First" mantra contrasts with Barack Obama's commitment to multilateralism; Trump invariably depicts China as a threat and takes it as given that any costs to the U.S. stemming from the Paris Agreement are "unfair," while the Obama administration sought to partner with China, reaching a bilateral accord that laid the foundation for the global Paris Agreement. Trump rejects not only the need to reduce U.S. emissions, but also any U.S. responsibility to assist the developing countries already paying a disproportionate price for historical U.S. emissions, refusing to pay the \$3 billion Obama committed to the Global Climate Fund.

Trump's Rose Garden address reaffirmed these differences. He offered a nostalgic vision of a mid-20th century economy predicated on paper, cement and steel manufacturing. He reiterated his "love" of coal, an industry in inexorable decline due to abundant U.S. natural gas, not climate policy, a sharp contrast to the vision of the Obama administration—and a number of American business leaders—who have offered a vision of U.S. competitiveness driven by clean energy innovation.

Having embraced both climate science and multilateralism, most Canadians are appalled by Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. We are relieved that our elected leaders have joined other countries in reiterating our commitment to the Paris Agreement. But lest we feel too smug, the competing economic visions evident in the U.S. are also present, if less visible, within the Canadian polity.

Canada committed under the Paris Agreement to reducing our emissions to 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. The federal government has promised a national carbon price, among other laudable policies. However, we do not yet have a plan to meet our 2030 target. The shortfall in reductions just happens to match anticipated emissions growth from the tar sands. In fact, the oil industry is the only industrial sector from which emissions are expected to continue growing to 2030.

In Paris, Canada joined other countries in committing to do our part to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius. On Thursday, Environment Minister Catherine McKenna offered reassurances that "Canada will continue to take a leadership role to tackle climate change at home and abroad." Yet rather than transitioning away from fossil fuels, we are committed to expanding our oil production.

Is Canada's doubling down on our fossil-fuel economy really so different from Trump's nostalgic championing of U.S. coal?

One critical difference is that the United States burns its own coal, oil, and gas, while Canada exports most of the fossil fuels we produce. The resulting greenhouse gas emissions thus appear on other countries' ledgers. This has allowed Canadians to overlook the ways we contribute to and prosper from global climate change.

It also has allowed Canadian politicians of all stripes to pretend that we can have it all. How many times have we all heard that "the environment and economy go hand in hand?" While that is true in theory, it does not follow that every economy is consistent with a sustainable environment. Investment in new infrastructure, expected to increase Canada's fossil fuel exports for decades to come, is not consistent with the transition necessary to limit climate change to 2 degrees Celsius. Viewed in that light, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's statement that we need to expand fossil-fuel production in order to pay for Canada's emissions reductions makes no sense.

Although less visible in the Canadian context than the U.S., the choice between dependence on fossil fuel development and investment in a clean energy transition is no less real. And today's policy decisions by our own governments loom just as large for Canada's economic future.

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