

## University of Virginia Center for Politics



## Talking Turkey: Environment & Energy

### General Facts

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the executive organization that addresses environmental concerns in the United States. Formed in 1970, the EPA oversees the implementations of current environmental policy, such as the Clean Air Act or Superfund, and performs additional research to help develop new policies.
- Most scientists agree that global warming is a major environmental issue today. Global warming is the result of an increase in greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere, raising the temperature on Earth to a level that is harmful to people and the environment. The scientific community has shown that excess greenhouse gases are caused by increased carbon dioxide levels from human pollution including factory pollution, cars, and deforestation. Nevertheless, there remains debate amongst some political actors as to the degree to which human populations are to blame for the effects of global warming.
- Most of the fuel the United States uses for energy comes from Fossil Fuels (oil, coal, and natural gas). Fossil fuels are non-renewable-- meaning that at a certain point, there will be no more fossil fuels to use. Fossil fuels are also major polluters, heavily contributing to the high carbon dioxide levels that are so problematic for our environment. A major goal for both Republicans and Democrats is reducing our dependence on foreign oil as well as our overall consumption of non-renewable energy sources. Many politicians and environmentalists are trying to find ways to incorporate technologies that are fueled by renewable energy sources into daily life.
  - Alternative renewable energy sources include solar power, hydroelectric power, wind power, and ethanol (a liquid fuel, like gasoline, which is usually made from corn or switchgrass).

- Until 2016, the Kyoto Protocol was the major global effort to curb fossil fuel usage and pollution. The Kyoto Protocol was passed in 1997 at the third Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto, Japan. R
  - Ratified by over 170 countries, the Protocol committed developed nations to reducing greenhouse gases and creating programs to help developing nations keep emissions low.
  - The Kyoto Protocol encouraged member nations to find ways to reduce emissions, while still preserving economic activity.
  - The United States signed the protocol, but Congress never ratified it, so the United States was never bound by the protocol's rules.
  
- Other important environmental issues include: endangered species, deforestation, polluted water sources, toxic waste and its health effects, fair distribution of environmental wastes, fertilizers/pesticides vs. organic, nuclear power etc.
  
- In 2016, the Kyoto Protocol was effectively replaced by the Paris Agreement, a global plan which aims to give nations measurable, quantifiable goals for controlling climate change. The Agreement challenges nations to limit global temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius, with each nation deciding on its own what measures to take.
  - Source: [http://unfccc.int/paris\\_agreement/items/9485.php](http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php)
  - Currently, the United States is one of 122 countries that have ratified the Paris Agreement.
    - Because the United States is so large, and contributes large quantities of greenhouse gases, its involvement in any global climate agreement is critical.
    - The United States announced its intention to ratify with China, another major global polluter.
    - Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-climatechange-idUSKCN11901W>
  - As the United States inaugurates its 45th President, Donald J. Trump, future U.S. involvement in the Paris Agreement is uncertain. President Trump and his advisors have suggested that he is considering withdrawing from the agreement.

## **Links for Additional Info**

- In Depth
  - EPA: <http://www.epa.gov/epahome/aboutepa.htm>
  - Global Warming: <http://www.livescience.com/37003-global-warming.html>
  - Kyoto Protocol: [http://unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol/items/2830.php](http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php)
  - Sierra Club (general information, news links, etc.): <http://www.sierraclub.org/>  
<http://www.sierraclubfoundation.org/>
  - The Paris Agreement: <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/urgentissues/global-warming-climate-change/the-paris-agreement-what-does-it-mean.xml>
  
- Presidential and Party positions:
  - President Donald J. Trump: <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-trump-on-climate-change-policy>  
<http://fortune.com/2017/01/30/donald-trump-paris-agreement-climate-change-withdraw/>
  - Democratic Party: <https://www.democrats.org/issues/environment>
  - Republican Party: <https://www.gop.com/platform/americas-natural-resources/>
  
- Kid Friendly
  - NASA's Climate Kids: <http://climatekids.nasa.gov/climate-change-meaning/>
  - Nuclear Power Overview: <https://c03.apogee.net/contentplayer/?coursetype=kids&utilityid=pseg&id=16182>  
<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/basic-ref/students.html>
  - EPA Recycling: <http://www.epa.gov/recyclecity/mainmap.htm>
  - "Our Planet and Environment" <https://kids.usa.gov/science/our-planet/index.shtml>

## Talking Points with Your Child

- What are some things we can do as a family to reduce pollution? (i.e. turn off the lights and water, lower heat and air conditioning, recycle, buy local foods, etc.)
- What are Fossil Fuels? Why can't we use them forever? What sounds like the best alternative to fossil fuels to you?
- Nuclear power is renewable and some countries like France use it for a lot of their power. But nuclear power leaves toxic waste that has to be stored somewhere. Should we still use nuclear power? Where should we put the waste?
- Some people rely on coal mining and oil drilling to make a living. How can we reduce pollution and the use of fossil fuels without leaving these people jobless?
- What is global warming? How does it affect animals and plants? How does it affect humans? What should we do to stop it?
- (For Older Kids) Should the US remain a part of the Paris Agreement, or withdraw from it? Why or why not? If so, what are the consequences of withdrawal?