

Clean Energy and Climate Experts Letter to U.S. Presidential Candidates  
December 7, 2015

Dear U.S. Presidential Candidates,

As you make plans for your intended future administration to meet the many challenges facing the United States, we urge you to commit to a goal of unsurpassed potential and urgency: American leadership in the global clean energy economy.

Specifically, we call on you to endorse and build upon the US commitments at the international climate Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris to put our nation on a path to a vibrant economy free from carbon pollution by mid-century.

Today, we stand at the threshold of a remarkable transformation as the world moves swiftly away from the unsustainable fossil fuel economy of the 19th century into a resilient clean energy economy. This transformation is already occurring at a remarkable rate with strong bipartisan support and business leadership. Forty-seven of the world's largest businesses have pledged to source 100 percent of the electricity they use from renewable sources, including Apple, Google, and Wal-Mart. A few firms have already met this goal.

Our nation's gross domestic product (GDP) has grown since 2007 without increases in energy consumption due in large part to major advances in fuel economy in vehicles and energy efficiency in buildings. Solar power comprised 32 percent of all new electric generating capacity in the U.S. last year—a twelve-fold increase in the amount of solar photovoltaic installations since just five years ago. Wind power now generates about five percent of our nation's electricity, and in some regions already costs less than natural gas and coal-fired generation. Texas alone nearly doubled its wind energy generation between 2009 and 2014. Propelled by remarkable gains such as these, states and cities across our nation are setting ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions.

The next President will be uniquely positioned to ensure that our nation sustains and accelerates this transition. The dangers of inaction are also increasingly apparent and lend great urgency to this appeal.

As you know, the scientific evidence is overwhelming that carbon emissions from fossil fuels are changing our climate. Today, Americans – and people around the world – are experiencing the effects of these changes as extreme weather events linked to a changed climate become more frequent or intense, from prolonged periods of heat, drought and wildfires to intense downpours, encroaching tides, and floods.

Due to warming oceans and melting glaciers, sea level is now rising more rapidly than at any time during the past several thousand years, threatening coastal communities and vital national infrastructure. The oceans are becoming more acidic as they absorb some of the excess carbon dioxide released by the burning of fossil fuels, endangering marine life and fisheries upon which we depend. Further risks abound, including potentially large releases of methane from thawing permafrost in the Arctic, which would accelerate disruptive climate change.

Recognizing these threats, the U.S. and more than 150 other nations made commitments to limit emissions in preparation for this year's international climate summit in Paris. As the world's largest economy and largest historical emitter of heat-trapping gases, the U.S. has a special responsibility to provide leadership and an economic opportunity to be gained by doing so.

A low-carbon clean energy future is well within our reach at a modest cost. The United States has the technology to cut emissions by 80 percent by 2050, and according to [one recent study](#) could achieve these reductions with outlays of around one percent of the nation's GDP per year. In addition to a safer climate, moving away from fossil fuels will reduce deaths and disabling health impacts from air pollution, lessen destructive extraction practices, improve America's trade balance and increase our energy security. Such reductions, coupled with increases in carbon uptake in our nation's forests and soils, can bring us well within reach of an economy free of carbon pollution by mid-century.

A farsighted plan for clean energy leadership will require the next President to vigorously pursue a set of key goals, including:

- Committing to meet and exceed the near-term goals the U.S. brought to COP21 of reducing emissions 26-28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025;
- Putting a price on carbon and phasing out fossil energy subsidies, including those in the tax system, to ensure a level playing field for renewable energy, nuclear power, and other low- and zero-carbon technologies;
- Modernizing our antiquated energy transmission, distribution and transportation systems, and making further improvements in energy efficiency in buildings, transportation, industry and agriculture;
- Increasing investment in clean energy research and development to further accelerate cost reductions and improvements in promising areas such as energy storage and smart grids;
- Expanding international partnerships for clean energy adoption; and
- Increasing the preparedness of vulnerable communities at home and abroad for now unavoidable impacts of climate change.

The global transformation of our energy system away from fossil fuels is both a moral imperative, grounded in science, and one of the greatest economic opportunities of our time. As President, it would be within your reach to help set our nation and the world on a clear course toward a robust, clean economy free from carbon pollution. There is no time to waste.

As leading experts in clean energy, climate science and economics, we offer to brief you on the scientific, technical and economic underpinnings of potential policy options, and urge you to build on the momentum from the Paris Summit to put forward your commitment and vision for leadership on this defining issue of our time.

Sincerely,

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