



Climate Change

Summary and Key Talking Points

Policy Proposals

1. Reject carbon taxes and stop regulation of greenhouse gases.
2. Withdraw from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
3. Withdraw the Environmental Protection Agency's endangerment finding on greenhouse gas emissions and address the uncertainties in climate science.

Quick Facts

1. If the entire industrialized world eliminated all carbon-dioxide emissions, only 0.5°C of warming would be averted by the end of the century.
2. Low-income families would be hardest hit by climate-change policies. Americans with after-tax incomes of less than \$30,000 spend 23 percent of their budgets on energy, compared to just 7 percent for those earning more than \$50,000.
3. Eighty percent of the world's energy needs are met through natural resources like coal, oil, and natural gas.

Power Phrases

Promote a Clean Environment and Affordable Energy

- A clean environment and affordable energy fuel our economy and improve our lives.
- Supporting a clean environment, however, does not mean giving in to climate alarmism that has consistently produced false predictions of catastrophe.
- Many climate-change policies and proposals would be economically disastrous for American families and businesses, with no meaningful climate benefit.
- The U.S. should implement energy policy that improves the well-being of Americans, not harsh policies that would make everything from groceries to gas more expensive for Americans, with little impact on climate-change.

The Issue

No one knows the extent to which human activity plays a role in a changing climate, as do several naturally occurring factors, but global warming is neither a planetary emergency nor justification for any massive, costly government programs to curtail energy use. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), for example, does not conclude that the world has until 2030 to avoid catastrophic global warming. One must distinguish between what climatologists know and what they do not know or *might* know, so that objective, transparent science can inform public policy choices.

Mainstream climate science does not comport with climate change alarmism or catastrophe. The IPCC's most recent report estimates that warming since 1850 amounts to 1.1°C. It found increasing trends in heat waves, heavy precipitation, and some kinds of drought, and it found downward or no trends for hurricanes, winter storms, and extreme cold, floods, tornadoes, or thunderstorms. The most extreme projections for warming—those deemed “most likely” in the IPCC's 2014 Fifth Assessment Report—were downgraded to “low likelihood.”

Objective, transparent science should be an important tool in the formation of public policy. This is especially important because there are still significant areas of disagreement in the scientific community about the nature and pace of warming. Independent efforts to determine the severity of climate change more accurately would help policymakers to take any necessary cost-effective, verifiable, and effectual actions.

No matter how urgent the need to combat climate change, proposed federal policies like cap and trade, carbon taxes, or regulations on vehicles and power plants would be ineffective tools. The U.S. could eliminate all of its greenhouse gas emissions, and there would still not be any significant effect on warming overall. Even assuming that the alarmist projections are correct, because the United States represents only a portion of global greenhouse gas emissions, the entire world would have to change how it consumes energy to have any significant effect on global temperatures. It is pure fantasy to expect that developing countries—technically still including China—would be willing to forego inexpensive and abundant carbon dioxide-emitting energy in favor of more expensive, intermittent sources to provide energy for energy-poor families and their growing economies.

The costs of such aggressive policies are significant and would leave Americans with fewer resources to combat current and future environmental challenges, whether climate-related or otherwise. The direct effect of higher energy costs is just a small part of the story. Energy is a necessary input for nearly all goods and services. Consequently, Americans would pay more for food, health care, education, clothes, and every other good or service that requires energy to make and transport.

Far too often, so-called climate solutions seek to re-engineer America's system of limited, representative government and free enterprise. For instance, the Biden Administration's proposed regulations on power plants and vehicles would impose monumental changes on America's electricity, transportation, manufacturing, and agricultural sectors to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If enacted, these proposals would fundamentally change how people produce and consume energy, harvest crops, raise livestock, build homes, drive cars, and manufacture goods. Washington would make decisions on behalf of consumers and producers, and every American would bear the costs, with the poor suffering the most. These policies, in addition to being costly, would have no discernible effect on the climate and would strip freedoms and prosperity from the American people.

Recommendations

In order to preserve affordable and reliable energy for Americans, the U.S. government should:

Stop the regulation of greenhouse gases. The Biden Administration has implemented a suite of greenhouse gas emissions regulations and executive orders that have unnecessarily driven up energy prices and eliminated choices while having no meaningful climate impact. Worse are its regulatory efforts to regulate vehicle tailpipe and power plant emissions, that would essentially ban internal combustion vehicles and completely wipe out America's current energy-producing infrastructure. Future Administrations should direct agencies to reconsider and withdraw most of these rules. However, lasting leadership and change must come from Congress. Congress should prohibit the federal government from regulating greenhouse gas emissions and clarify that the Clean Air Act was never intended to regulate greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide.

Make targeted spending decisions to build resilient infrastructure. Whether carbon-dioxide levels rise, fall, or stay the same, the United States and the rest of the world will experience extreme weather events. Climate and land will continue to change for a wide variety of reasons. Without question, extreme weather and long-term climate changes can adversely affect communities and infrastructure. The federal government (when applicable), state and local governments, and the private sector should address climate-related infrastructure vulnerabilities through site-specific and situation-specific analysis and spending. Federal, state, and local policymakers should use the best available science to prepare more effectively—*before* storms inflict damage—to maximize resilience and preparedness.

End the use of “social cost of carbon” in government cost-benefit analyses. Federal agencies perform cost-benefit analyses for a wide range of regulatory and permitting decisions. Under the Obama Administration, agencies began to incorporate a “social cost of carbon” in these analyses to assess the alleged social costs of an activity emitting carbon dioxide. The statistical models upon which the federal government relies offer significantly different results when using a variety of justifiable inputs; as a consequence, values are essentially arbitrary and are not credible tools for policymaking. Congress should prevent any agency from using regulatory analysis metrics with the “social cost of carbon” and the “social cost” of other greenhouse gas emissions in any cost-benefit analysis or environmental review. If federal courts force regulators to estimate the costs of climate change, they should assess climate effects in terms of global temperature change as a result of the proposed project, using a tool like the Model for the Assessment of Greenhouse-Gas Induced Climate Change.

Withdraw the endangerment finding and address the uncertainties in climate science. The Environmental Protection Agency should reconsider its endangerment finding on greenhouse gas emissions, recognizing that greenhouse gas emissions are affecting the climate but that no credible evidence suggests that the Earth is heading toward catastrophic warming. Physicist Steven Koonin, former Undersecretary of Energy for Science in the Obama Administration, proposed a climate “Red Team/Blue Team.” Inspired by the national security community’s Red Team exercise to challenge assumptions, reduce risks and uncertainties, and correct for biases, a Red Team/Blue Team would provide a public, transparent exchange on major issues surrounding climate science.

Withdraw from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The most effective way to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement is to withdraw from the entire UNFCCC, the treaty underlying the Paris agreement. The Paris agreement specifies that any government withdrawing from the UNFCCC “shall be considered as also having withdrawn from this Agreement.” The process for withdrawing from the UNFCCC requires one year, which accelerates the process considerably. Moreover, departure from the UNFCCC would prevent future Administrations from using that framework to avoid obtaining the Senate’s advice and consent in the treaty process. Congress should urge the Administration to withdraw from the UNFCCC.

Reject carbon taxes and carbon tariffs. Carbon-based resources account for 80 percent of the energy resources used by Americans. A carbon tax is a tax on energy and, in effect, on the entire economy. Levying a price on carbon dioxide would directly raise the cost of food, electricity, transportation, manufacturing, and nearly every good and service that Americans need and consequently would be regressive, hurting poor Americans—who spend a larger share of their incomes on energy—the most. Similarly, a carbon tariff would impose a carbon tax on imported goods, which would increase prices throughout the economy. Even if Congress implemented a plan to return the revenue to the people and avoid carving out revenue for special interests, Americans would still face higher costs overall and would therefore lose much more than they would gain. Like every other regulatory or subsidy scheme to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions, a carbon tax is by no means a free-market solution, nor would it have any meaningful impact on global temperatures.

Facts + Figures

FACT: Big-government policies to slow down global warming would have no meaningful impact on climate.

- Using the Model for the Assessment of Greenhouse-Gas Induced Climate Change, the United States could eliminate all greenhouse gas emissions immediately and expect only 0.2°C of averted warming by 2100. If the entire industrialized world eliminated all carbon-dioxide emissions, only 0.5°C of warming would be averted by the end of the century.
- Carbon dioxide-emitting natural resources like coal, oil, and natural gas meet 80 percent of the world's energy needs. Coal remains a dominant source of energy globally. Since 2000, global coal-fired power capacity has doubled, and roughly 6,700 coal plants are in operation around the world providing heat and electricity. Even as some Western countries try to phase out coal production and use, new coal plants are being built in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa where access to electricity is desperately needed.

FACT: Climate policies would be costly and would disproportionately harm the poor, farmers, and small business.

- The Green New Deal and other extreme climate policies aim to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Because 80 percent of America's energy needs are met by coal, oil, and natural gas, reaching that target would be incredibly costly.
- Using a derivative of the U.S. Energy Information Administration's National Energy Model, Heritage analysts employed a \$300-per-ton carbon tax on the economy that achieved a reduction of 50 percent to 52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.
- The average employment shortfall would be more than 1.2 million jobs with a peak shortfall of more than 7.8 million jobs. The cost to the overall economy would be \$7.7 trillion through 2030, and the loss of income for a family of four would be more than \$87,000.
- Gasoline prices would increase by more than \$2 per gallon beginning in 2024.
- Low-income families would be hit the hardest by climate policies. Americans with after-tax incomes of less than \$30,000 spend 23 percent of their budgets on energy, but those who earn more than \$50,000 spend just 7 percent of their budgets on energy, according to the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity.
- Small businesses would be affected because they rely on vehicle transportation, often pickup trucks, for their businesses.

FACT: "The science is settled" and "97 percent of climatologists agree" talking points are wrong.

- The 97 percent figure comes from a 2013 *Environmental Research Letters* study by John Cook and eight colleagues that examines the abstracts of nearly 12,000 academic papers on climate change and global warming between 1991 and 2011. Of those papers, 66 percent expressed no opinion on anthropogenic warming, 34 percent "endorsed" anthropogenic warming, 0.7 percent

rejected anthropogenic warming, and 0.3 percent were unsure of the cause. Of the 34 percent expressing an opinion on man-made global warming, “97.1 percent endorsed the consensus position that humans are causing global warming.” The claim says nothing about the urgency or danger of climate change.

- David Legates, former director of the University of Delaware’s Center for Climatic Research, and three other researchers analyzed the same set of papers analyzed in the Cook study. They found that a mere 0.3 percent of all papers, or 1 percent of the 4,014 papers expressing an opinion on the matter, claim that the majority of warming since 1950 is man-made.
- There are major areas of uncertainty in climate science. They include the accuracy of climate models (exaggerating warming), how a doubling of carbon-dioxide emissions impacts global temperatures, and which trajectory of greenhouse gas concentrations most accurately reflects the future. There is no consensus on imminent climate catastrophe.

Resources

The Heritage Foundation, [Heritage Explains: The Right Way to Ensure a Cleaner Environment](#).

The Heritage Foundation, [Heritage Explains: The Truth About Climate Change and Hurricanes](#).

Kevin D. Dayaratna, Katie Tubb, and David Kreutzer, [The Unsustainable Costs of President Biden’s Climate Agenda](#), Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3713, June 16, 2022.

Katie Tubb, [Carbon Border Tax Is Outside the Venn Diagram of Compromise](#), Heritage Foundation *Commentary*, May 24, 2022.

Jack Spencer, [Debunking Another Misleading Green Energy Subsidy Study](#), Heritage Foundation *Commentary*, June 5, 2023.

Diana Furchtgott-Roth, [Flawed Fossil-Fuel “Subsidy” Math](#), Heritage Foundation *Commentary*, September 7, 2023.

Travis Fisher, [EPA’s Power Grid Assumptions Are Disconnected from Reality](#), Heritage Foundation *Commentary*, July 26, 2023.

Diana Furchtgott-Roth, [Biden’s Plan to Phase Out Gas-Powered Cars Is All Pain for Consumers and No Gain](#), Heritage Foundation *Commentary*, June 26, 2023.

Nicolas D. Loris, [Paris Climate Agreement: Instead of Regulations and Mandates, Embrace Markets](#), Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 6058, February 25, 2021.

Norbert J. Michel, David R. Burton, and Nicolas D. Loris, [Using Financial Regulation to Fight Climate Change: A Losing Battle](#), Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3634, June 24, 2021.

Kevin D. Dayaratna, [Why “Social Cost of Carbon” Is the Most Useless Number You’ve Never Heard Of](#), Heritage Foundation *Commentary*, March 2, 2021.

Nicolas D. Loris and Brett D. Schaefer, [Withdraw from Paris by Withdrawing from the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3220, May 25, 2017.

Nicolas D. Loris and Brett D. Schaefer, [The Kigali Amendment Offers Little Benefit to the Climate, Great Cost to the U.S. Economy](#), Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3309, April 30, 2018.

David Kreutzer, Nicolas D. Loris, Katie Tubb, and Kevin D. Dayaratna, [The State of Climate Science: No Justification for Extreme Policies](#), Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3119, April 26, 2016.