

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY**

HEARING CHARTER

***The President's UN Climate Pledge:
Scientifically Justified or a New Tax on Americans?***

Wednesday, April 15, 2015
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

PURPOSE

The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology will hold a hearing entitled *The President's UN Climate Pledge: Scientifically Justified or a New Tax on Americans?* on Wednesday, April 15, 2015 in Room 2318 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing will examine the scientific justification and economic impact of the United States' submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) issued on March 31, 2015.¹

The Obama Administration's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) commits the United States to reducing greenhouse gas emissions 26-28% by 2025, based on the 2005 level, with "deep, economy-wide emission reductions of 80% or more by 2050."² The hearing will review the scientific understanding and uncertainties of this proposal; examine the technologies and authorities required to meet the Administration's commitment; and evaluate the environmental impact and economic cost of this proposal. With several interim meetings during the course of the year in Germany, the UNFCCC is planning to hold its Conference of Parties with many heads of state in Paris in late November-early December with plans to ratify a treaty-level agreement on climate change among member nations.

WITNESS LIST

- **Dr. Judith Curry**, Professor, School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, Georgia Institute of Technology
- **The Honorable Karen Harbert**, President and CEO, Institute for 21st Century Energy U.S. Chamber of Commerce (former Assistant Secretary for Policy and International Affairs, U.S. Department of Energy)
- **Mr. Jake Schmidt**, Director, International Program, Natural Resources Defense Council
- **Dr. Margo Thorning**, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist, American Council for Capital Formation

¹ UNFCCC, United States' Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. March 31, 2015. Available at:

<http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/indc/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>.

² *Id.*

BACKGROUND

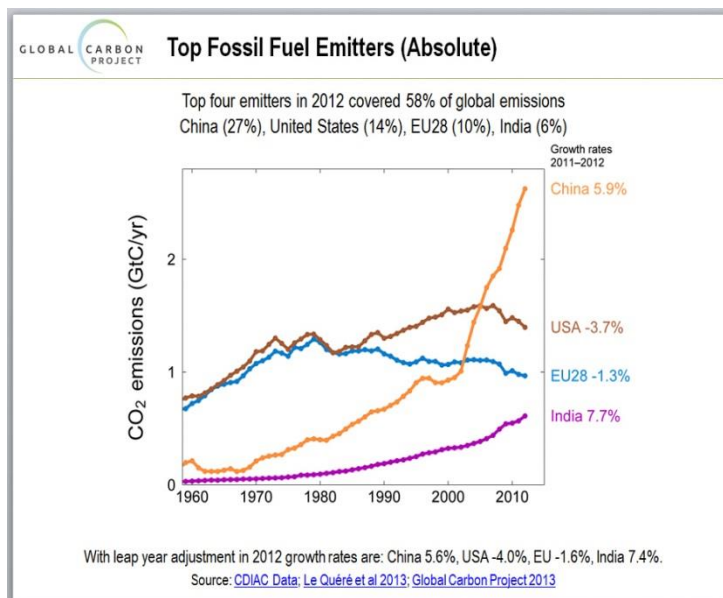
The international body overseeing the subject of the Earth's changing atmosphere is the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Framework Convention on Climate Change was negotiated and subsequently adopted by the United Nations in May 1992.³ Countries that signed the treaty, including the United States, are known as "parties." According to the Congressional Research Service:

The United States, as a Party to the UNFCCC, has qualitative obligations to report national GHG emissions; cooperate on science and technology development; enact programs to abate emissions; and provide agreed new and additional financial resources to assist low-income countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change. When the UNFCCC was drafted, the then-industrialized countries emitted two-thirds of annual GHG emissions (excluding emissions from deforestation). These Annex I countries correspondingly accepted a lead role in abating GHG emissions, though all countries agreed to "common but differentiated responsibilities."⁴

Notably absent from the original Annex I countries are China and India, who today make substantial greenhouse gas emissions compared to other countries.⁵ A total of 196 countries (including China and India) eventually signed on to the treaty, giving it near universal membership. Countries meet annually at a "Conference of the Parties" (COP) to negotiate and discuss responses to climate change.⁶

Kyoto Protocol & Beyond

In 1995, at the first COP in Berlin, German representatives put forth the Berlin Mandate, which established a process to revise and strengthen commitments for developed countries.⁷ The Mandate laid the groundwork for the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted by the UNFCCC in 1997 at the third COP.⁸ The Kyoto Protocol established the world's first international greenhouse gas emissions reductions



³ UNFCCC, 20 Years of Effort and Achievement. 2015. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/timeline/>.

⁴ Congressional Research Service, A U.S.-Centric Chronology of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. November 8, 2013. Available at: <http://www.crs.gov/pdfloader/R40001>.

⁵ See , Global Carbon Project, Carbon Dioxide Analysis Center, U.S. Department of Energy. 2014. Available at: <http://cdiac.ornl.gov/GCP/carbonbudget/2013>.

⁶ Congressional Research Service, A U.S.-Centric Chronology of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. November 8, 2013. Available at: <http://www.crs.gov/pdfloader/R40001>.

⁷ *Id.* See also: UNFCCC, Report of the Conference of the Parties. June 6, 1995. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/cop1/07a01.pdf>.

⁸ *Id.* See also: UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol. 2015. Available at: http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php

treaty. In 2001, at the seventh COP, the Marrakesh Accords were put forth, outlining agreements and detailed operational guidelines for implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.⁹ In 2005, the Kyoto Protocol entered into force, with a commitment period starting in 2008 and ending in 2012.¹⁰

In 2011, at the seventeenth COP, signatories committed to agreeing to a new climate change protocol by 2015 for future greenhouse-gas emissions reductions beyond the Kyoto Protocol.¹¹ Recent COPs have largely focused on working toward a new agreement for the upcoming meeting in Paris November 30-December 11, 2015.

However, forging an agreement that incorporates enforceable accountability without infringing upon the independence of sovereign nations is a major challenge. From the outset, the UNFCCC has grappled with the question of real-world implementation. According to the Congressional Research Service, “[t]he question of how to share any effort to address climate change has been a core challenge for international cooperation. Because emissions come from all countries, only concerted reductions by all major emitters can stabilize the rising GHG concentrations in the atmosphere.”¹²

Beyond the task of quantifying global emissions reductions and allocating contributions, cost is a fundamental challenge. “The wealthiest Parties (including the United States) pledged “fast start” financing approaching \$30 billion during 2010-2012, and a goal of mobilizing financing of \$100 billion annually by 2020.”¹³ However, financing and “loss and damage” payments remain a core area of disagreement between parties.¹⁴

Intended Nationally Determined Contributions

In advance of the Paris COP, participating countries were asked to submit a domestic plan to address the objectives of the Convention, called an Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC).¹⁵ These plans are expected to include:

“quantifiable information on the reference point (including, as appropriate, a base year), time frames and/or periods for implementation, scope and coverage, planning processes, assumptions and methodological approaches including those for estimating and accounting for anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and, as appropriate, removals, and how the Party considers that its intended nationally determined contribution is fair and ambitious, in light of its national

⁹ UNFCCC, 20 Years of Effort and Achievement. 2015. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/timeline/>.

¹⁰ UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol. 2015. Available at: http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php

¹¹ UNFCCC, 20 Years of Effort and Achievement. 2015 Available at: <http://unfccc.int/timeline/>.

¹² Congressional Research Service, A U.S.-Centric Chronology of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. November 8, 2013. Available at: <http://www.crs.gov/pdfloader/R40001>.

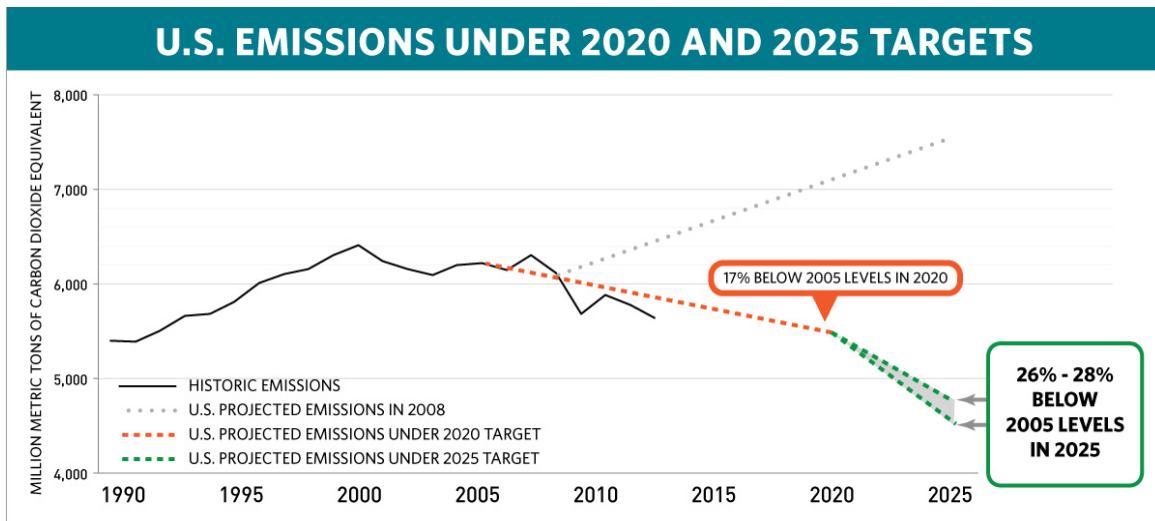
¹³ Congressional Research Service, International Climate Change Financing: The Green Climate Fund, February 2, 2015. <http://www.crs.gov/pdfloader/R41889>.

¹⁴ See Submission on Elements of the 2015 Agreed Outcome, Like Minded Developing Countries, March 8, 2014. Available at <http://www.crs.gov/pdfloader/R41889>.

¹⁵ UNFCCC, Intended Nationally Determined Contributions. 2015. Available at: http://unfccc.int/focus/indc_portal/items/8766.php

circumstances, and how it contributes towards achieving the objective of the Convention as set out in its Article 2.”¹⁶

On March 31st, the United States submitted their INDC to the United Nations. The United States’ INDC “intends to achieve an economy-wide target of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28 per cent below its 2005 level in 2025,” and “deep, economy-wide emission reductions of 80% or more by 2050.”¹⁷ The document notes that the United States has undertaken policy actions to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, but also notes that “additional action to achieve the 2025 target represents a substantial acceleration of the current pace of greenhouse gas emission reductions.”¹⁸ Below is a graph from the official U.S. INDC submission.



ADDITIONAL READING

- United Nations, Framework Convention on Climate Change, Intended Nationally Determined Contributions Submissions: United States. March 31, 2015. <http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/indc/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>
- Congressional Research Service, A U.S.-Centric Chronology of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. November 8, 2013. <http://www.crs.gov/pdfloader/R40001>
- Congressional Research Service, International Climate Change Financing: The Green Climate Fund, February 2, 2015. <http://www.crs.gov/pdfloader/R41889>

¹⁶ *Id.* See also:

http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/lima_dec_2014/application/pdf/auv_cop20_lima_call_for_climate_action.pdf

¹⁷ UNFCCC, United States’ Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. March 31, 2015. Available at:

<http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/indc/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>.

¹⁸ UNFCCC, United States’ Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. March 31, 2015. Available at:

<http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/indc/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>.