

Energy & The Environment

Climate change is a serious issue that deserves sensible solutions from our national leaders. Instead, liberals are pitching pie-in-the-sky pipe dreams that would be laughably unrealistic if they weren't so threatening to the American people's well-being and our nation's economy and future. We need an environmental policy that doesn't sacrifice jobs on the altar of leftwing theology and re-establishes American leadership in the march toward energy independence.

A Global Challenge

Human action is affecting the global climate. While the extent of our impact is still unclear, there is widespread consensus that man-made climate change is a real and serious issue.

This is no longer just apparent to scientists studying complicated climate models. Many of the most visible symptoms of our changing world are apparent to Americans across the country: depleted coral reefs off the Florida coast, wildfires ravaging northern and southern California, reduced snowfall in the mountain west and New England. Increasingly, these problems are affecting all Americans, and they require uniquely American solutions, grounded in the competition and innovation of the free market.

Unfortunately, the ideas promoted by the left and by the environmental lobbying industry only weaken the United States and will hurt millions of Americans. Their so-called solutions are so unrealistic and expensive that they have little-to-no chance of addressing the most pressing needs of our country and our planet. To tackle this issue, we need to be honest and humble. And we need to do this in a way that makes America stronger.

We Shouldn't Have Paris

Nothing demonstrates the pie-in-the-sky approach better than the Paris Agreement. The result of a United Nations conference in 2015 designed to tackle the challenges of a changing climate on a global scale, it aimed to commit all the nations of the world to reduce carbon emissions in order to fight the rise in global temperatures. It was also completely unworkable and counter-productive and remains so to this day. The Trump administration was right to withdraw from the Paris Agreement.

To this day, the Paris Agreement is the blueprint for how liberals aim to combat climate change. It was spearheaded by a group of environmental bureaucrats whose efforts were doomed to failure and destined to cause untold damage to the lives and livelihoods of both current and future generations.

First, the Paris discussions centered on the idea that use of oil, coal, and natural gas is an unmitigated disaster for the world and should be sharply curtailed. Yet this ignored the fact that these sources [account](#) for about 80 [percent](#) of the world's energy consumption. Sharply reducing their use would impose vast costs on the global economy, hurting billions of people—especially the poor.

At the same time, the agreement encouraged the developed nations of the world to de-industrialize, while simultaneously subsidizing poorer nations' efforts to develop expensive alternative energy sources. Put another way, it sought to take money from countries like America and leave us worse off economically.

The Paris Agreement was not right for the United States. It committed us to [reduce](#) greenhouse gas emissions by 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels by the year 2025. To meet this lofty goal, liberals sought to foist a [slew](#) of new regulations on the American people. Among them [were](#) new fuel-efficiency rules for vehicles, energy-efficiency guidelines for buildings, and carbon-dioxide limits for power plants. Some of the American people's most important choices across huge parts of the economy would now be [dictated](#), in part, by outcomes negotiated by unelected foreign bureaucrats in Paris.

It's telling that the Obama administration [chose](#) to enact the Paris Agreement as a “climate agreement” rather than as a treaty. Quite simply, it lacked the necessary congressional support for ratification by the Senate—and the Senate's lack of enthusiasm was justified. An agreement that started from so many flawed presumptions got even worse as it moved into law.

The accord, like several of its forebears, [lacked](#) any substantial enforcement mechanism. As a result, some of the world's worst polluters could continue to poison our atmosphere while its most responsible actors, the United States chief among them, would be tied down. For example, China emits [more](#) carbon dioxide than the United States and the European Union combined. But the rules of the Paris Agreement give it something even better than a free pass, allowing Beijing to [increase](#) its carbon emissions until the year 2030. What's more, China faces [no penalty](#) under the Paris Agreement if it fails to meet even that lowly commitment.

The agreement also fails to constrain China – instead, it allows the Chinese Communist Party to damage the environment. Despite signing the document, China [has](#) 121 gigawatts of coal plants currently under construction, and the country has far weaker [environmental](#) and [health](#) standards than America. Moreover, the Paris Agreement gives the Chinese government free rein to [peddle](#) its cheap pollutants to other countries—including building poor-quality coal plants—which [undercuts](#) our ability to build energy alliances throughout the world.

The Paris Agreement is even more lenient with other nations. India [agreed](#) to cut its emissions by 2030, but, it is permitted to emit up to 160% percent more than its 2010 emissions in the meantime. Pakistan went so far as to [state outright](#) that “an exponential increase of [its] emissions for many decades is likely to occur before any decrease in emissions can be expected.”

It should be no surprise that quite a few nations that signed up to the Paris Agreement are not on [target](#) to meet their emission goals. Liberal critics who decried the Trump administration's withdrawal from

the accord are missing the point: while there may be signatures on a piece of paper, the accord's lack of rules and enforcement mechanisms rendered it dead on arrival.

What makes the left's enthusiasm for the agreement even more difficult to understand is its seemingly willful ignorance of the economic costs Paris would impose. Although estimates vary, one thing is clear: our commitments under the accord would lead to the [loss](#) of hundreds of thousands if not [millions](#) of American jobs—many of which would be in manufacturing.

The conclusions? Critics of the Trump administration are bemoaning the death of a non-treaty that would eliminate jobs and damage the economy, all while turning a blind eye to the world's worst polluters and failing to accomplish their stated goal of reducing global emissions. The Paris Agreement is a case study in bad negotiating and it will always be a bad deal for America.

Green New World

Amazingly, the so-called Green New Deal, unveiled by Democratic members of Congress in February 2019 in a cloud of doomsday predictions, makes the Paris Agreement look mild.

Except for one important distinction. The goal of the Green New Deal isn't really about reducing emissions or taking care of the environment. It is a vehicle to realize socialist ambitions by turning entire sectors of the economy over to government control. It would alter the fabric of American life in unprecedented ways and at an unfathomable expense.

What exactly does the [Green New Deal](#) (GND) propose?

It [starts](#) with the elimination of coal, natural gas, and oil within the next decade. The costs of this would be stunning. By one estimate, [replacing](#) the non-renewable parts of the U.S. economy with wind, solar, and biomass would cost \$2.9 trillion dollars—just shy of a year's tax [revenue](#). Another [estimate](#) puts the cost at \$4.7 trillion, or \$35,000 per household. Either way, that's just for the basics. As the Green New Deal's biggest champion, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, [conceded](#), her GND would cost at least \$10 trillion in total. Her counterpart in the Senate, Bernie Sanders, [priced](#) his plan at \$16 trillion.

In a moment of candor, the authors of the original Green New Deal [released](#) a fact sheet explaining the goals of their legislation. Among them: the elimination of 99 percent of cars—and, indeed, anything with an internal combustion engine—and to replace every building in America. But what makes these liberal pipe dreams truly dangerous is just how far their vision reaches.

The GND blames environmental degradation for every perceived social ill imaginable, from racial tension to economic inequality to other “systemic injustices.” To right these wrongs, it orders the federal government to provide every single American citizen with health care, housing, and a job. Leaving no detail to chance, the GND even guarantees all Americans paid vacation. Readers of the legislation may be forgiven for forgetting that it is supposed to address the environment.

Bernie Sanders's plan would have gone even further in spinning socialism as the cure for the planet. His GND proposed to "end greed" and create 20 million government jobs. Those jobs would have been sorely needed, because Sanders's centrally-planned energy [market](#) would have, in effect, rendered private energy production unviable and killed an entire American industry.

Far from being a concern of the past, the Green New Deal is a clear and present danger. It lives on through Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden. While Biden doesn't call his climate plan the Green New Deal, [progressives](#) have clarified that it "is a Green New Deal in all but name." Joe Biden's [multi-trillion-dollar plan](#), which Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders [helped write](#), is basically a [government jobs and infrastructure program](#). It would raise electricity prices on families and dole out untold [billions of dollars in corporate welfare](#) to politically-favored energy companies. It would be the most extreme environmental plan in American history, and like the Green New Deal, it has more to do with government control than improving the environment.

The Green New Deal is utopian socialism at its worst. Its authors have sold the GND as a way to address climate change when, in reality, it would remake our entire society along socialist lines. The cost of this radical makeover, in both dollars and human freedom, would be simply mindboggling. Instead of misusing the power of government, our political class should adopt sensible solutions that are staring us right in the face.

The Shale Revolution

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is key to a better environmental and economic future. It is the process of injecting pressurized liquid into deep underground wells to enable the extraction of petroleum or natural gas deposits. While it was discovered midway through the twentieth century, fracking has gained significant steam over the last decade in the shale fields of Appalachia, the western Dakotas and eastern Montana, and in the Permian Basin area of west Texas. The shale revolution's benefits have been substantial.

Start with the employment opportunities it has created. Although estimates vary, studies agree that fracking supports [hundreds of thousands](#), if not [millions](#), of high-paying jobs. These jobs have sprouted all over the country to satisfy the need for new infrastructure to help process and transport the natural gas and oil that fracking produces.

The economic benefits of fracking don't end with new jobs—they extend to the wallets of every American. The Trump administration [estimates](#) that fracking has contributed to a 63 percent reduction in the price of natural gas and a 45 percent decrease in the wholesale price of electricity. Meanwhile, shale production has [led](#) to a 10 percent decline in the global price of oil. "By lowering energy prices, we estimate that the shale revolution saves U.S. consumers \$203 billion annually, or \$2,500 for a family of four," the administration said in October 2019. Because low and middle-income Americans spend a greater percentage of their income on heat and power bills than wealthy Americans, these savings are especially noteworthy and beneficial.

And those are just the economic benefits. Fracking, despite what liberal alarmists would have you

believe, has significant environmental advantages, too. In a speech at Georgetown University in June 2013, President Obama [recognized](#) that natural gas extraction “can provide safe, cheap power, but it can also help reduce our carbon emissions.”

Unlike many leaders on the left today, President Obama was right: the chief benefit of fracking technologies is that they enable us to exploit our vast natural gas resources, which emit exponentially less carbon dioxide than other fuels. In 2017, carbon emissions were a quarter lower than the Energy Information Administration predicted them to be in 2006, thanks in part to the fracking revolution. It is no exaggeration to say that fracking has [lowered](#) our greenhouse gas emissions by hundreds of millions of metric tons each year.

But perhaps the most convincing reason to support hydraulic fracturing is that it helps us achieve the goal of energy independence. Fracking has helped us expand our international presence as an energy supplier: oil from fracked American wells [accounted](#) for about 8-10 percent of global oil supplies as of November 2019.

Today, the United States is the largest energy [producer](#) in the world, producing more natural gas than Russia and more oil than Saudi Arabia. Our independence has enhanced our national security and curbed the ability of bad actors like Iran to hold global energy markets hostage. This would have been simply unfathomable to anyone looking at the global energy picture twenty, even fifteen, years ago.

Unfortunately, the leading members of the socialist vanguard regard fracking as an outright evil that needs to be outlawed by government decree. Many of them, including Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, have supported a complete and [total ban](#) on the practice. Never mind that fracking is vital to the economies of some of our largest and most diverse states, like Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Texas.

Fracking holds such promise precisely because it helps fill so many of our needs. It provides a safe, dependable way of accessing multiple sources of energy. It enables the push toward [energy independence](#), which means less dependence on fossil fuels from other nations whose values we may not share. It creates good-paying jobs for Americans across the country. And it helps contribute to a global reduction in carbon emissions, which everyone agrees is good for the planet.

Capture the Future

Fracking is just common sense. But it’s only one building block when it comes to smart environmental and energy policy. There are other common-sense ideas that can help move us toward energy independence while helping protect the environment at the same time. Some of these, like nuclear energy, are decades-old technologies that have proven their worth. Nuclear energy should be dramatically expanded, not reduced, as some [liberals propose](#).

Others worthwhile ideas are more recent breakthroughs that are just beginning to show their promise. One of them, [carbon capture](#), involves treating carbon dioxide as a waste product like any other. It in-

volves capturing CO2 before it enters the air (or even after) using advance scientific methods, and then burying permanently and safely underground, or even using it as a commodity.

This practice, known as carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS), allows us to partner with the private sector and use market forces to help reduce global emissions. This makes particular sense because the private sector already uses a vast amount of carbon in its everyday operations.

From bottling and fuel production to feedstock and other agricultural products, carbon is a part of everyday operations for wide swaths of the economy. Over time, CCUS may be able to switch the source of that carbon from the ground to the air. The advantage is that with a few breakthroughs we won't need to completely remake our economy to protect the environment—we need only to use the tools and resources already being developed.

Energy companies are already putting a great deal of research and development into new technologies like carbon capture. They demonstrate how, instead of the government re-engineering the economy, we can combat climate change with American innovation.

Another important idea to address global climate change is reforestation. It is even simpler than carbon capture. It's so simple it needs little explanation: much like it sounds, reforestation involves nothing more than planting trees. But the global scale for its prospects is immense.

By one estimate, around 200 million hectares of deforested land – an area about three times the size of Texas – currently [provide](#) little or no food production and are eligible for reforestation. Reforesting this land would sequester emissions equivalent to those produced by 640 million cars per year.

According to another study, reforestation has the [potential](#) to conserve hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide per year within the next half-decade in the United States alone. This could benefit [every corner of the country](#), from the Central Mississippi Valley to the Pacific Northwest, with accompanying jobs in forestry and land management to boot. It's why Republicans in Congress have [introduced](#) legislation to plant a trillion trees by 2050, an initiative that President Trump [touted](#) in February 2020 during his State of the Union address.

Straight-forward ideas like reforestation possess immense potential. At the same time, a host of new technologies also promise to make it easier for us to become energy independent in ways that are clean and safe for the world around us.

Advances in energy storage, for one, appear to hold great promise. Many current clean energy sources, like solar and wind power, suffer from a lack of storage capacity—much of what they generate must be expended quickly or wasted. Advances in storage technology would allow us to take more thorough [advantage](#) of these alternative sources by making them longer-lasting and more portable. Wind and solar power units would then be able to function like giant batteries.

Other developments, like [microgrids](#) and artificial intelligence (AI), also point toward a better energy future. Microgrids are local power grids that can operate with or without connection to a larger tradi-

tional grid. With assistance from developments in AI, they can help make the storage and transmission of energy more efficient and affordable.

All of these developments point to an essential truth. To seize our energy future, we must work with the private sector rather than demonize it. Where government can help, through [science funding](#), it should do so. But the only real answer is American innovation.

It is impossible to predict which technologies will be successful in solving the problem of climate change, and government should never be in the business of picking winners and losers. But it is certain that the solution will only be found if we lean on the problem-solving spirit of the private sector and reject the extreme and irrational ideas on the left that would only sap American innovation, not unleash it. The reality is that where capitalism takes root, a cleaner environment follows. America is the proof.

Pro-Capitalism, Pro-Climate

By opposing such sensible solutions to America's energy issues—and, potentially, to the world's climate crisis—the far left ignores the essential role that capitalism can play in solving our environmental problems and improving our economy. Already, companies are reducing their emissions because it makes sense for them, not because the government is pressuring them to do so. In fact, in 2019, the government [reported](#) that energy-related carbon dioxide emissions shrunk by 2.8 percent. That is a sign of progress, driven by the private sector.-

It's time to shift that progress into overdrive, and that means embracing capitalism instead of undermining it or seeking to replace it with socialism. Economic growth, energy independence, and environmental stewardship go hand in hand.

America can lead on the way on all these issues. We don't need massive new government expenditures, restrictive international agreements that give free rein to China, or a wholesale makeover of the economy. We don't need irresponsible ideologues hawking their daydreams in search of a revolution. We don't need government bureaucrats controlling ever more of our lives. What we really need is American entrepreneurship and innovation. We have plenty of that, and we have plenty of affordable energy, too. We should unleash all of it, for the benefit of our country and our planet.