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Higher Education Calls Withdrawing the US from the Paris Agreement A Mistake

Today the Trump Administration doubled down on the ill-advised decision to pull the United States out of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Soon the State Department will submit notice to the United Nations starting a one-year countdown to the complete withdrawal of the United States from an agreement that every other country in the world continues to support. While not unexpected, it is yet another sign that climate leadership in the United States will not come from the current administration, but rather through leaders and citizens from businesses, state and local governments, colleges and universities, and other sectors in society in addition to restoring the climate leadership of the federal government. Second Nature and the higher education institutions in the Climate Leadership Network -- more than 440 colleges and universities across the United States formally and actively committed to achieving carbon neutrality -- reaffirm their intentions to accelerate climate action to ensure a just future.

Presidents and chancellors at higher education institutions from Maine through Pennsylvania, Nevada, and California continue to partner with their communities on building large scale renewable energy systems, low-emission transportation infrastructure, net zero energy buildings, and resilience plans to be prepared for the present and future impacts of climate change. The Administration's decision has only reinforced higher education's sense of urgency and unity to rapidly scale solutions, train the new workforce for a green economy, and continue to act as stewards of our nation's students and their future.

The Administration's actions have inspired higher education leaders to again raise their voices supporting the relevance of climate action to higher education.

"There can be no higher priority for our nation than addressing climate change. Society, its economic underpinnings, America's security and our personal lives all depend on a healthy environment. The science is clear, and the time to act is now. We must take immediate steps to reduce the dangers associated with climate change and engage in actions that slow the process." - Jane Close Conoley, Ph.D., President, Cal State Long Beach

"TMCC is committed to the inclusion of sustainability and resiliency concepts and principles into academic programs, curriculum, and physical infrastructure of the College. Students, faculty, and staff take pride in passionate advocacy for the environmental and human health of future generations." - President Dr. Karin Hilgersom, Truckee Meadows Community College

"It is imperative we commit and collaborate globally to find opportunities for creativity, transformation, and growth even as we face the turbulence of a rapidly changing climate. Allegheny College remains steadfastly committed to achieving carbon neutrality in 2020 and modeling to our students and community what it means to be an engaged, ambitious change agent in a diverse, interconnected world." - Hilary L. Link, Ph.D., President, Allegheny College

"Despite all the efforts to derail years of work, there is huge momentum across the US, from towns, cities, states, and regions, to keep the commitments our country has made to create a cleaner, more sustainable economy. As leaders in higher education, we must embrace the very important roles our institutions can play in this effort, serving as generative spaces for community dialogue, creative problem solving, and collective action on the most urgent problem facing humanity right now." - President Darron Collins '92, College of the Atlantic

"Significant reductions to carbon emissions are crucial to our national interests, but no single country can stop this damage alone. The U.S. is on course to be the only country in the world that is not in the Paris Agreement, which offers the best way to secure the cooperation needed to address the climate problem around the globe." - President Dianne F. Harrison, California State University, Northridge

"The only good thing coming out of Trump's hostility to the Paris agreement is the groundswell of local awareness and action it has caused. Having colleges and universities come together with business, nonprofits, and local and state governments will be invaluable as we deal with the impact of climate change that is already here, and will only get worse in the future. Our students will be fighting this battle long after the present administration is gone." - Wim Wiewel, President, Lewis and Clark College

"The US has been the global leader in developing the science that has identified the acceleration of processes driving climate change and the emerging technologies that allow us to see and understand the primary consequences of this changing climate and more variable weather. The coalescence of the global science community and governments to take actions informed by this science is unprecedented and will continue. Although President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is regrettable, the proactive actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the nation and the world continue. We should celebrate the bipartisan efforts here in the U.S., - such as in Maryland, other States and local governments - that recognize the existential need to take action today to allow ecosystems and society a chance to adapt and to ensure our grandchildren will be able to thrive in the same way as our generation." - Peter Goodwin, President, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science

"The President's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement is at odds with widespread public concern about climate change and it undercuts the progress we are making to combat it. Luther College has demonstrated that it is possible to reduce emissions at the rate required to avoid catastrophic climate change. Our investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy have cut our carbon footprint in half and we are on course to be carbon neutral by 2030." - President Jenifer K. Ward at Luther College

"The decision to withdrawal is deeply disappointing on many levels, as the U.S. should lead by example in this critical area. Regardless, Virginia Wesleyan University will continue its efforts to reduce carbon emissions and uphold the commitment it has made to pursue carbon neutrality by 2040." - Dr. Scott D. Miller, President of Virginia Wesleyan University

“The University of Denver is committed to its students and their futures. Combating climate change and its disastrous consequences is a key part of ensuring the next generation’s future is not threatened. Global collaboration and commitments such as the Paris Agreement put us on the right path forward and should be upheld.” - Chancellor Jeremy Haefner, University of Denver

As an organization whose mission it is to accelerate climate action in, and through, higher education, Second Nature will continue to support the leadership of our colleges and universities and the work they’re doing, while also providing them with partnership opportunities with others who also share the climate urgency.

About Second Nature

Second Nature is committed to accelerating climate action in, and through, higher education. This is accomplished by mobilizing a diverse array of higher education institutions to act on bold climate commitments, to scale campus climate initiatives, and to create innovative climate solutions. Second Nature aims to align, amplify, and bridge the sector’s efforts with other global leaders to advance urgent climate priorities. [Secondnature.org](https://secondnature.org).

About We Are Still In

Since We Are Still In launched in 2017, more than [3,800 leaders](#) from America’s city halls, state houses, boardrooms, and college campuses have stepped forward to declare their support for the global solution to climate change. Spanning all 50 states — red and blue — they are demonstrating America’s enduring commitment to tackling climate change, ensuring a clean energy future, and upholding the Paris Agreement.

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