

THE PARIS ACCORD

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You've probably heard the title being thrown around in casual climate change conversations. That is unless you've been living under a rock for the last couple of years. However, a lot of us have in fact been emulating the life of Patrick Star. And that's why I want to shed some light on this topic for my fellow rock dwellers.

WHAT IS IT?

For those of you confused about what the agreement is really about, well here's a simple explanation. The Paris Accord, also known as the Paris Agreement, is a voluntary agreement between multiple countries to combat the menacing "death star" like threat of climate change. Voluntary is the keyword here as there are no binding terms to force countries into taking any form of action. The entire point is for all these countries to come together in order to ensure the right steps are being taken towards combatting climate change. Said steps include setting carbon emissions targets, setting targets to shift to more renewable sources of energy and to donate towards helping developing countries achieve cleaner energy. The only real action member countries get to take against each other is shaming each other in case one of them fails to meet the targets which, once again I cannot stress enough, they set for themselves.

THE SCIENCE

The major goal of the agreement is to ensure that the global temperature rise doesn't exceed the 2 degrees Celsius threshold. Instead, member countries will attempt to work together in order to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The 0.5 degree difference has a greater "real" magnitude than you can imagine. This extra half degree is what separates us from disaster. As we have seen, rising temperatures have resulted in longer heat waves, reduced availability of freshwater in the Mediterranean, reduced crop yield, resulting in a shortage of food supply, and rising sea levels. The extra half degree causes a substantial, negative fluctuation in each of these factors, which points towards an inevitable global crisis in the next 20 years. Limiting temperature rise to 1.5 de-

PARIS AGREEMENT: STATUS OF RATIFICATION



grees is on its own a great challenge, and that's why such a small offset from this number can be what separates survival and large scale disaster.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

As already mentioned, carbon emissions are a major contributor to rising temperatures. Controlling the level of carbon emissions by allocating a carbon budget is the ideal way to handle the issue. A carbon budget gives us an idea of just how much carbon we can globally emit while trying to adhere to our aforementioned temperature rise goal. Creating a carbon budget and trying to maintain it seems tough, but the Paris agreement would allow all of these countries to come together and set targets for their carbon emissions, thus working towards controlling the carbon budget. Additionally, switching to more renewable forms of energy will play a significant role in maintaining the budget.

THE US DEPARTURE AND THE CONSEQUENCES

In 2017, US President Donald Trump announced to the world that the USA would be leaving the Paris Accord. His reasoning was, as with most of his ideas, lacking in evidence and logic. Not to mention how much of a paranoid grandpa the current president-elect seems to be. However, he spawned multiple lies about how the agreement was a hit job to harm the country's economic progress and that other members were in cahoots to undermine the US. The departure was the first of its kind, and while the Paris Accord has more countries than ever signed on to the deal, the lack of US presence can be strongly felt. When the most powerful country in the world leaves the biggest, global scale agreement towards combatting climate change, it sets terrible precedence.

Even worse is the fact that the US continues to push a narrative that denies the science behind climate change and actively promotes climate change scepticism. The overall combination of such actions is likely to result in developing countries, which look to the US as a world leader, to disregard climate change, thus failing to stop the inevitable disaster at bay.

The only silver lining in this horror story is the actions of the remaining members of the agreement. China has showcased plans to spend around \$360 billion in renewable energy by 2020. This plan is also estimated to create 13 million

new jobs in the future. Even large corporations, the most unlikely of heroes, are showcasing support for the deal by creating their own plans for shifting to sustainable renewable energy in the near future.

While the absence of the US will leave a permanent scar in the battle against climate change (mostly because the US is one of the highest carbon emitting countries in the world), the Paris Accord will stand as a testament to the first time such a significant number of countries came together in order to promote action and accountability for their own contributions to climate change.

Even in the US, there are currently talks about a new agreement for the fight against climate change, one which doesn't intimidate the older generation as much. And if anything, in this time of reckoning, it's a sign that things aren't as bleak as we would think them to be.

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