

It's official: President Trump has decided to pull the U.S. out of the Paris agreement. So far as I can, there's little support for his decision from anyone who is not beholden to the coal industry. Sadly, this decision is only one way in which this President has dashed the hopes of the world.

This is a bitter pill to swallow. What will the effects be?

We need to begin by being clear about the withdrawal process. Article 28 of the Paris Agreement provides:

1. At any time after three years from the date on which this Agreement has entered into force for a Party, that Party may withdraw from this Agreement by giving written notification to the Depositary.
2. Any such withdrawal shall take effect upon expiry of one year from the date of receipt by the Depositary of the notification of withdrawal, or on such later date as may be specified in the notification of withdrawal.

Thus, the U.S. cannot give formal notification of its withdrawal until November 4, 2019, three years after the agreement went into force. Withdrawal would take one year later, just before the 2020 election.

This means that Trump's decision to withdraw could be changed any time until November 2019. That gives him a lot of time to change his mind.

Withdrawal from the agreement will have no direct effect on U.S. emissions. Trump's regulatory rollbacks are designed to ensure that our carbon emissions will increase, and whether we belong or don't belong to the Paris Agreement has nothing to do with that, as Ann Carlson has [pointed out](#). And failure by the U.S. to make a good faith effort to meet its targets would undermine the agreement to some extent, even without a formal withdrawal.

The biggest concern about withdrawal is that it would unravel the entire agreement. It seems unlikely that this would happen in the short run. The EU and China are [announcing](#) their renewed joint commitment to climate action tomorrow. At this point, Trump has already convinced our allies that they cannot count on the United States, as shown by Angela Merkel's [comments](#) after the G7 meeting. Given that Trump is withdrawing the U.S. from its traditional role of global leadership, other countries will be less likely to follow his example.

Paris is not the only agreement where we are a global outlier. Something similar happened

with the Law of the Sea Convention (LOS). The U.S. signed LOS but has never ratified, due to opposition from the far Right. Almost every other country does belong to the Convention, and the Convention has thrived without us. In fact, the U.S. recognizes much of the Convention as legally binding anyway, viewing it as so well established that it is binding as customary international law. The main effect of our outsider status is to hurt ourselves, since we cannot claim the benefit of the Convention on issues such as national jurisdiction in the newly open areas of the Arctic Ocean.

In terms of the longer-term effect of withdrawal from Paris, that depends in part on what happens in the U.S. If the Democrats regain the House in 2018 and the White House in 2020, the rest of the world will rest easier and Paris will be safer. We would then have to work out a way to rejoin the global effort. Obviously, we wouldn't be turned away from the negotiations. But our credibility, and hence bargaining leverage, could be decreased to the extent that we cannot be relied on to keep to our bargains. On the other hand, Trump's reelection would require other countries to reconsider this as well as many other aspects of international relations, as they adjust to the U.S. position as an international outlier. Economics also matters: if the price of renewables continues to drop, adherence to the Paris agreement becomes much easier.

In the meantime, Trump's action means that those of us who recognize the threat of climate change must redouble our efforts. This is a battle we cannot afford to lose. As Indian Prime Minister Modi said on Tuesday, "We do not have the right to spoil the environment for future generations . . . Morally speaking, that would be a crime on our part."