President Donald Trump’s announcement that he will withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement may have dramatic consequences for his administration – but not in the way he might imagine. His announcement is toothless. The U.S can’t withdraw from the Paris Agreement until the next Presidential election (assuming he makes it to the end). Yet his faux withdrawal has generated widespread international contempt, and may generate far more domestic political opposition than any support it gins up among his base.

After all the reality show hoopla accompanying the announcement, nothing has actually changed. Trump’s speech was just an empty political gesture and yet the world hung on his every word. We are still a party to the Paris Agreement. We will be a party for the rest of Trump’s first term (assuming he makes it to the end). The Agreement prevents parties from withdrawing for three years after it takes effect and then another year after a party announces it is withdrawing. That means that until the next presidential election, we are obligated 1) to work to cut our emissions by 26- 28 percent by 2025; 2) to make financial contributions to developing countries most affected by climate change; and 3) to provide regular accounting of our greenhouse gas emissions by source.

Trump has made abundantly clear – long before his grand announcement – that he will not honor these obligations, especially the first two. He has repudiated virtually every element of the “nationally determined contribution” submitted by the Obama Administration, including the Clean Power Plan, stringent automobile standards and limitations on methane emissions. He has produced a budget that provides no money for developing countries affected by climate change despite the Obama Administration’s commitment of $3 billion ($1 billion of which we already paid). He has gone even further, zeroing out the U.S. contribution to the fund that pays for the international climate negotiations. And, of course, he has proposed slashing budgets for climate staff across every department in the federal government, including the State Department, and eliminating virtually all research and development funds for clean energy.

We knew all of this before his announcement that the U.S. would withdraw. And since he cannot exercise the right to withdraw for several years, we are in exactly the same position today than we were yesterday.

Indeed, Trump has left advocates for robust climate policy in the strongest possible circumstances given his opposition. We remain in the Paris Agreement and yet the popular view is that we will withdraw. The international community, and many domestic voters, are enraged. Trump’s need to turn his announcement into a circus has focused the world on just how draconian and senseless Trump’s position is on

climate change, especially given the voluntary nature of the U.S.’s commitment. The Paris Agreement provides no meaningful mechanism to punish countries that fail to live up to their obligations and commitments. The only real recourse is political. Trump may have managed to galvanize opposition far more ferocious than had he announced that he would keep the U.S. in the Agreement.