In this post, I want to talk about some of the ideas that make it hard to have sensible discussions about climate policy. I don't mean outright climate denial. Instead, I'm talking about less blatant misconceptions that keep many people from thinking seriously about cutting carbon emissions.

Myth #1. EPA climate rules are a regulatory power grab.

The main agency regulating greenhouse gases is EPA. Because the first regulations were issued under Obama, it's understandable that many people think he took the initiative to claim authority over climate change. Actually, however, the initiative came from the Supreme Court. Over a year before Obama took office, the Court ruled that EPA had authority to regulate greenhouse gases. The Court also forced EPA's hand: if EPA found that greenhouse gases cause climate change, it has to issue regulations. The Court later ruled out lawsuits against the power industry for climate change; the reason for doing so was that EPA had jurisdiction over carbon emissions, not judges.

Myth #2. Cutting carbon emissions is unaffordable.

You often hear about the crushing economic burden of eliminating carbon emissions. The reality is that the costs of wind power, solar energy, and energy storage have fallen much faster than anyone expected. In many places, renewable energy is cheaper than fossil fuels. Deep cuts in emissions will take very large investments, but the market is already moving in that direction for economic reasons. That's why the coal industry continued its slide during the Trump Administration.

Myth #3. Only coastal liberals support renewable energy.

President Trump, with his references to "windmill cancer," certainly reflects one view on the Right. When you take a look at what Republican states are doing, you see something quite different. Texas produces more energy from wind than any other state in the union. It's one of a tier of deeply Republican states that produce much of the nation's wind power, starting there and stretching up toward the Dakotas. Texas also expects that new electricity generation in the state will come from renewables. In Congress, one of the biggest backers of wind power is Chuck Grassley from Iowa — that's because Iowans make a lot of money from the wind industry.

Myth #4. This isn't the right time for big emission cuts.

This myth has a version on the left end of the political spectrum and a different version on the Right. The Left version is that it's too late for cutting emissions to make a difference because we're already doomed. There's really no science behind the idea that cutting emissions won't matter. Basically, the models show that warming 2. °C of warming would be worse than 1.5°, which wouldn't be a picnic either. But 2.5 °C or warming would be worse than 2°, and 3° C would be worse yet. Any ton of carbon we keep out of the atmosphere is that much to the good. The Right version is that it's too early to cut emissions: we should wait until we have better technology or until we have a political consensus. The trouble with that view is that CO2 stays in the atmosphere for many decades, even centuries. The longer we wait to cut emissions, the more the climate will change. If you're drowning, it doesn't make sense to wait until you can take more lessons until you start swimming.

Myth #5. It makes no sense for us to cut emissions until the rest of the world does, or maybe until there's a legally binding treaty requiring universal emission cuts.

This has been seen as a reason to avoid emission cuts since the 1990s if not earlier. There are several reasons why this is wrong. First, the reason of the world is actually taking action. The European Union is well ahead of us. China has committed to major cuts, not as fast as we would like, but faster than anyone expected a decade ago. Second, if everyone waits for the rest of the world to act first, no one will do anything. Other countries won't continue cutting emissions unless they see us getting on board too. Third, while a strong international treaty would be great, experience has shown that we can do a lot without one. Those intermediate steps are also key to building the kind of confidence that will lead countries to trust each other enough to enter into a treaty.

These myths aren't as destructive as outright climate denial. But they do get in the way of having a real conversation about what the government should be doing about climate change. It's time for people to get past them.