

Roth: Leading or following China on climate?

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on April 10, 2017.



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Over the years, much has been made in American politics about whether America should do more to lead the world on solutions for combating climate change.

Now I am not talking about the “climate deniers” who are against the enormous consensus of actual scientists; those political scientists who try to score political points alleging there isn't consensus. I am talking about that second

group of politicians and prognosticators who say: “Why should we do something when China isn’t?”

But first, more about those actual scientists. According to NASA, yes that NASA, and its Global Climate Change website, climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus, “Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities. In addition, most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position.”

The following is a partial list of these organizations:

- American Scientific Associations including American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Chemical Society; American Meteorological Society and the Geological Society of America.
- The United States National Academy of Sciences.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- 200+ worldwide scientific organizations that hold the position that climate change has been caused by human action.

So, once you accept that scientific evidence is or may be believable, you get to the “Why should we” crowd. It is this crowd I was wondering about as America’s president met with China’s president in Florida. That is a clear departure from past administrations pushing on China, and their enormous emerging economy, to move in a more committed path towards limiting human effects on climate and global warming.

Have we agreed to follow? Is it possible that America’s new directions on energy, coal, pollution and climate change will be eclipsed by a China that is actually doing more on climate action? Let us take a look.

At the end of 2016, China released its 13th Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, a guidebook that has become how the Communist Party maps out China's direction. The plan has three sub-plans focused on controlling greenhouse gas emissions, environmental protection and development of the power sector.

Taken together, these renewed pathways build upon the previous steps and measures underway that have actually reduced their coal consumption three years in a row, helping reduce China's carbon dioxide emissions by about 0.7 percent last year.

What's more, the three sub-plans lay out a comprehensive set of policies to benchmark China's goals for 2020, which will allow them to actually exceed their 2030 goals in the Paris Agreement. They have capped coal usage, they have pushed even tougher caps in areas of poorer air quality and they have redoubled efforts to develop low-carbon technologies and policies.

America seems to be moving in the opposite direction, when we could and should in fact lead the charge to solve one of the greatest, if not the greatest challenge we face in our lifetimes. Our country's outstanding DNA and drive has made us a leader in innovation, economy and moral fortitude to move others to solve global challenges. We should not reverse course now and lose the chance to lead this enormous opportunity for our lives and our economy.

What's more, for those who feel we should not lead because others may not follow, I would ask: When does America ask for a show of hands to determine if it does the right thing? We should continue to lead and we should realize other excuses may be vanishing as other countries do more. China included.

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