

Roth: Syria, Nicaragua and Trump's America

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You have probably heard by now that Donald Trump has announced his intentions to withdraw the United States of America from the Paris climate accord, a non-binding agreement dealing with greenhouse gas emissions mitigation, adaptation and financing starting in 2020.

This accord was negotiated within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and as of June has been signed by

195 countries and already ratified by 148. Yes, that is most, as in almost all, of the countries of planet Earth.

Who isn't now a party to this historic global effort to safeguard our planet? Syria (current war-torn catastrophe), Nicaragua (who believed the accord "didn't go far enough") and Trump's America (which he stated was disadvantaged in job areas such as coal mining).

However, as many American business CEOs and world leaders denounce Trump's announcement, an even more meaningful reaction is taking hold: The "other America" of state and local governments, where the great majority of Americans live, is seemingly pushing forward to honor the Paris accord and its pollution reductions.

In fact, the U.S. Climate Alliance was formed by the states of California, New York and Washington to uphold the Paris climate agreement, on the same day Trump announced his intentions for the federal government. Other states and cities will surely follow and in their course undermine Trump's efforts to speak for all of us.

And why does this matter? Mostly because the world is now a global economy and the power of people and populations drive commerce more so than federal U.S. policy. Put another way, what California does often dictates what businesses and manufacturers do for all of America and beyond.

California, currently the sixth-largest economy in the world, has been a leader for decades in numerous American energy and environmental policies. When then-President-elect Trump began filling his Cabinet with nominees who rejected the idea that human activity effects climate change, California Gov. Jerry Brown cautioned that the state would take action if necessary to safeguard its environmental policies.

California's large economic prowess allows it to command higher standards in many arenas, (like vehicle fuel and

emission standards and natural gas storage and safety rules) since business and industry will create their products to adhere to California standards for its large market.

California is a beacon of hope for those in the climate-change-is-real category (and for those who want to see America continue to lead the world in innovation and environmental protection).

And even though these first three large states are run by Democrats, let us not forget that some formidable American environmental accomplishments came at the hands of Republicans. President Nixon signed into law the Clean Air and Clean Water acts, created the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

“Everyone talks about red states and blue states,” said Hal Harvey, CEO of Energy Innovation, a San Francisco-based policy research group. “We really have to start talking about green states and brown states. There are about a dozen states – many of them in Republican control – with very strong renewable portfolio standards and very strong utility energy efficiency programs, and utilities are going to be the prime movers in building the electric vehicle charging infrastructure.”

It is more likely than not, America’s green states will stay committed to the voluntary Paris accord and its pollution reductions because state rights and a global economy remain supreme, while Trump’s America becomes a patchwork of brown states aligned with a few outlier nations like Syria and Nicaragua. Stay tuned.

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