

Obama Unveils U.S. Emissions Targets for UN Climate Summit

By [Alan Neuhauser](#) March 31, 2015

The plan formalizes President Obama's pledge in China in November.

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Cows graze near the coal-fired Chalk Point Generating Station May 29 in Benedict, Md. The EPA's Clean Power Plan would curtail carbon dioxide emissions from existing power plants.

The Obama administration [reasserted its commitment](#) to [combating climate change](#) on an international scale Tuesday, submitting its plan to the U.N. to cut U.S. carbon emissions by up to 28 percent by 2025.

The plan, which essentially formalizes an [identical pledge President Barack Obama made during a November summit in China](#), met an informal first-quarter benchmark for nations to unveil how they plan to reduce heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions. In December, [negotiators from nearly 200 nations will gather in Paris](#), where they hope to hammer out an agreement based on those targets to mitigate global warming, adapt to its affects like rising sea levels, and assist developing nations rein-in their carbon emissions without slowing the growth of their economies.

Countries responsible for nearly 60 percent of the world's carbon pollution have already submitted or "publicly announced and committed" to carbon-reduction targets, White House senior adviser Brian Deese said in a call with reporters Tuesday. The U.S. plan, which summarized the mix of executive actions the Obama administration has already enacted to shrink the country's carbon footprint, would put the country on a path of reducing its carbon output "on the order of 80 percent by 2050," Deese said.

"The administration's climate work will help meet the ambitious but achievable goal we have submitted today," Deese said. "We have the tools we need to meet this goal and take action on pollution. And we know this is good for our economy, good for our health and good for our future."

Mexico, Norway, Switzerland and the European Union had submitted their plans as of late Tuesday morning. A Paris accord, if achieved, would mark the first climate agreement to include developed and developing countries alike, not just wealthier nations such as the U.S.

The plan the U.S. submitted is not legally binding.

Faced with partisan intransigence and GOP opposition in Congress, Obama has made robust use of his executive authority to sidestep Congress in addressing climate change. His administration has proposed the first [nationwide rules limiting carbon emissions from existing power plants](#), [stricter regulations for unconventional shale oil and gas development](#), [tighter fuel economy standards](#), [limits on methane and other heat-trapping gasses](#) and a range of new energy efficiency standards for homes and other buildings.

Said to be seeking a non-binding accord in Paris – one that would not require ratification by the Senate – Obama and his cabinet secretaries have repeatedly [named climate change an urgent threat](#) to economies, public health, national security and nations' very being.

"No challenge – no challenge — poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change," Obama [said in his State of the Union address](#) Jan. 20, just days after [NASA confirmed 2014 was the Earth's hottest](#) since record-keeping began in 1880.

Nonetheless, GOP leaders on Capitol Hill, such as Sen. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, have voiced strong opposition to Obama's climate actions, declaring they will raise utility rates, undercut reliability and hamstring U.S. policy.

"Our international partners should proceed with caution before entering into a binding deal with the U.S.," McConnell, who has contested the existence of man-made climate change, said in a statement, echoing similar warnings to Iran as it negotiates a nuclear deal with the U.S.

Environmental groups and Democratic lawmakers, however, roundly welcomed the State Department's submission, known by negotiators as "Intended Nationally Determined Contributions."

"The president has again demonstrated leadership in addressing the threat posed by climate change," Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., said in a statement. "Today's announcement confirms that the United States is doing its part to reduce dangerous carbon pollution, and this effort will continue to bring other countries along the path to a strong agreement in Paris."

Natural Resources Defense Council president Rhea Suh said she agreed, declaring the commitment "sends a powerful message to the world."

A report published earlier this month by DBL Ventures, a venture capital firm that supports clean energy projects, found states that generate the greatest share of electricity from renewable sources like wind and solar experience lower energy prices than states with the smallest share of green power.