



2017-08-14

The BMUB fact-checks Trump

In his speech on the US withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, delivered on 1 June 2017, US President Donald Trump made a series of claims to justify his decision. We have put these claims to the test, with results that reveal blatant fallacies. Mr Trump's speech does not stand up to fact-checking in decisive points. A selection of these follows.

Does the Paris Agreement really punish the US?

Trump: “As someone who cares deeply about the environment, which I do, I cannot in good conscience support a deal that punishes the United States – which is what it does – [...]”

Fact-check: False. The agreement is not a punishment for anyone or any individual country.

Does the Paris Agreement forbid the US certain things that it allows other countries?

Trump: “[...] China will be able to increase these emissions by a staggering number of years – 13. They can do whatever they want for 13 years. Not us.”

Fact-check: False. The US, as a matter of course, is allowed to implement climate action however it feels is right. The basic premise of the Paris Agreement is that each country determines its own contribution to climate action. However, the agreement obliges each country to take measures in order to reach its self-determined goal and to report regularly on its progress in relation to the goal. The Chinese nationally determined contribution plans for peak emission levels to be reached by 2030 at the latest. However, scenarios show that China's emission levels will likely peak much earlier and that the country, overall, is taking more ambitious action than it promised. In addition, it is important to consider that US greenhouse gas emissions are over 20 tonnes per capita annually; China's are about 10 tonnes per capita annually. It is not the Paris Agreement that is unfair, but the difference in per capita emissions. Because of this difference, countries with very high emission levels must reduce their output of greenhouse gases earlier and more decisively, while less developed countries are able to continue to increase their emissions for a period.

Trump: “Further, while the current agreement effectively blocks the development of clean coal in America – which it does [...]”

Fact-check: False. The Paris Agreement in no way blocks the development of “clean” coal technologies. The agreement is not an obstacle to or a ban on carbon capture and storage (CCS). In fact, it is quite the opposite: the agreement creates incentives for CCS, especially for use in industrial processes which require generating CO₂ emissions (e.g. steel and aluminium production).

Trump: “China will be allowed to build hundreds of additional coal plants. So we can’t build the plants, but they can, according to this agreement.”

Fact-check: False. The Paris Agreement does not prohibit any party from building coal-fired power plants. China is taking measures to achieve its nationally determined contribution and is even going the extra mile. At the beginning of the year, China announced that it would refrain from building over 100 coal-fired power plants. Investments in renewable energies in China are at record levels. In addition, China will be introducing a national emissions trading scheme.

Trump: “India will be allowed to double its coal production by 2020. Think of it: India can double their coal production. We’re supposed to get rid of ours. Even Europe is allowed to continue construction of coal plants.”

Fact-check: False. No one is being forced to phase out coal production. The Paris Agreement is built on reduction targets that countries determine themselves (nationally determined contributions, NDCs). The US can decide for itself how it will achieve its goal. If the US wanted to build coal-fired power plants, that would be possible under the terms of the agreement by preventing emissions in other sectors or by storing CO₂ (e.g. by using carbon capture and storage technologies). This strategy is not very practical, however, as there are other ways to reduce emissions in the energy sector much more cost-effectively, for example by expanding renewable energies.

A comparison between India and the US also has to take into account the very different circumstances of the two countries. India’s GDP growth rate is significantly higher than that of the US. In contrast, India’s per capita emissions are much lower than those of the US. Around 240 million people in India live without access to electricity. According to a report from the International Energy Agency, the per capita energy consumption of an average Indian person will still be 40% below the world average in 2040.

[Will the Paris Agreement really only curtail global warming by a “tiny amount”?](#)

Trump: “Even if the Paris Agreement were implemented in full, with total compliance from all nations, it is estimated it would only produce a two-tenths of one degree – think of that; this much – Celsius reduction in global temperature by the year 2100. Tiny, tiny amount.”

Fact-check: False. Mr Trump is referring to a 2015 report from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The authors of the report do actually come to the conclusion that the nationally determined contributions that had been submitted up until August 2015 would only reduce global warming by 0.2° Celsius by 2100. But Mr Trump is not providing the full picture:

1. The report only accounts for NDCs submitted by August 2015. A large number of countries had not submitted their NDCs by that date, including many high emission countries like India, Iran and Saudi Arabia.
2. Also, the NDCs evaluated in the report only focussed on the time period until 2030. All countries are required to submit more ambitious contributions for the time period after 2030. Even now, some countries are putting their climate action into effect in a more ambitious way than they originally planned.
3. The report also does not take into account the NDCs of some developing countries that made their commitments contingent on outside funding.

Despite these limitations, it is true that every country has to increase its efforts in order to keep global warming below 2° Celsius (and ideally under 1.5° Celsius). This is why the Paris Agreement makes provisions for countries to review their NDCs every five years and to make them more and more ambitious as time goes on. The gradual increase in the level of ambition is built into the agreement.

Trump: “In fact, 14 days of carbon emissions from China alone would wipe out the gains from America – and this is an incredible statistic – would totally wipe out the gains from America’s expected reductions in the year 2030 [...]”

Fact-check: Misleading on multiple levels.

Mr Trump is referring to an estimate from the Energy Innovation think tank. The estimate says that repealing the Clean Power Plan would result in increased emissions of more than 500 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. 500 million tonnes is only an estimate, and the increased emissions could also exceed that amount. Without regulation, emissions will only be limited by costs and profit. The same report from Energy Innovation estimates that repealing the Clean Power Plan would lead to increased emissions of 1,200 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2050.

The 500 million tonnes alone would be negative impact enough, exceeding France’s total emissions in the year 2013. But instead, Mr Trump chose the most populous country in the world, China, for his point of comparison in order to make the emissions savings seem as insignificant as possible. It would be much fairer to compare the per capita emissions of both countries. Per capita, China produces far less carbon dioxide equivalent emissions than the US and this will remain the case in future, according to every projection.

When you compare China’s absolute emissions with emissions reduction in the US, you’re comparing apples and oranges. Mr Trump could just as well point out that the emissions savings from the Clean Power Plan by 2030 are roughly equivalent to one month’s total US emissions. If Mr Trump thinks the US climate targets are insufficient, the right thing to do would be to adopt more ambitious targets.

[Will the Paris Agreement destroy jobs in the US?](#)

Trump: “Compliance with the terms of the Paris Accord and the onerous energy restrictions it has placed on the United States could cost America as much as 2.7 million lost jobs by 2025 according to the National Economic Research Associates.”

Fact-check: Highly doubtful. The report cited here is biased and was sponsored

by the US Chamber of Commerce and the American Council for Capital Formation.

Both sponsors reject active climate policy. The authors of the report admit that they have not considered the positive effects of innovations in the renewable energy sector or the (economic) benefits of mitigating climate change (and thereby preventing economically devastating natural disasters). The report only examines possible loss of jobs in “old” industries, completely excluding the job-creating potential of renewable energies and efficiency technologies. In addition, curbing climate change will save immensely on health costs – another point the report does not explore.

Trump: “This includes 440,000 fewer manufacturing jobs [...] According to the same study, by 2040, compliance with the commitments put into place by the previous administration would cut production for the following sectors: paper down 12 percent; cement down 23 percent; iron and steel down 38 percent; coal – and I happen to love the coal miners – down 86 percent; natural gas down 31 percent.”

Fact-check: Doubtful and misleading. The report Mr Trump is citing here – the same report as above – focusses on the impacts of the Obama administration’s Clean Power Plan. The Paris Agreement contains no binding provisions for individual sectors, despite what Mr Trump implies to the contrary. Countries are free to decide how they want to contribute to climate action. A number of other reports on the same topic have arrived at completely different findings. Most recently, experts from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the economic potential of resolute climate action. They came to the conclusion that a combination of climate action and growth policy tailored to climate action in the G20 countries will lead, on average, to overall economic performance that is 4.7% higher in 2050. Returning to the age of fossil fuels is not economically sound. This is true for the US too. In the US, 777,000 people already work in the renewable energies sector. The solar power industry alone grew 25% in 2016 to almost 400,000 jobs – already more than in the coal industry – and this trend will continue. The US wind and solar power sectors are growing 12 times faster than the rest of the US economy.

[Does the US spend more on climate action than others?](#)

Trump: Trump: “So we’re going to be paying billions and billions and billions of dollars and we’re already way ahead of anybody else. Many of the other countries haven’t spent anything. And many of them will never pay one dime.”

Fact-check: Misleading. According to the last official reports to the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), US climate financing was \$5.1 billion in 2014. In absolute numbers, this makes the US the second largest donor after Japan. Germany is in third place. Relative to per capita GDP, the US is among the five top donors in international climate financing – having said that, in last place among the five.

In addition to this, the US contributes 21.5% (about €4 million per year) of the core budget of the UNFCCC Secretariat, headquartered in Bonn, making it the largest contributor. This is because contribution levels are determined based on the wealth of the country. The US also contributed the largest share to the budget of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), providing about 38.5% (around €2 million per year) of the budget from 2010 to 2016. It is indisputable that American climate financing in recent years has played a major role in supporting developing countries and emerging economies in their climate efforts, particularly in the area of reporting. The US supports many countries in Africa and Asia in access to renewable energies. Overall, the US has made an important contribution in

the last several years. BUT: in per capita terms, US financing is significantly below the contributions being made by Western European countries.

Is the Green Climate Fund (GCF) just a mechanism for redistributing US wealth to other countries?

Trump: Trump: “Beyond the severe energy restrictions inflicted by the Paris Accord, it includes yet another scheme to redistribute wealth out of the United States through the so-called Green Climate Fund – nice name – which calls for developed countries to send \$100 billion to developing countries [...]”

Fact-check: Misleading. The \$100 billion are **not solely intended for the Green Climate Fund.**

One of the decisions made in Paris – one not explicitly set out in the Paris Agreement – was the continuation of the pledge made by developed countries in 2009 to mobilise \$100 billion annually for climate action in developing countries by 2020. These \$100 billion are meant to come from both public and private sources. A significant and not yet quantified share of this sum will flow through the Green Climate Fund. At the moment, the GCF has received commitments of around \$10.3 billion in its initial resource mobilisation period, which is likely to run from 2015 to 2018.

Trump: Trump: “[...] all on top of America’s existing and massive foreign aid payments.”

Fact-check: False. The funding that will be channelled through the GCF can be counted as official development assistance (ODA) and is therefore not “on top” of these payments.

Is the US required to pay into the Green Climate Fund?

Trump: “The Green Fund would likely obligate the United States to commit potentially tens of billions of dollars of which the United States has already handed over \$1 billion [...]”

Fact-check: False. The US has pledged \$3 billion to the GCF. This is not an explicit obligation in the Paris Agreement – it is a voluntary pledge that the US administration made at the first pledging conference to mobilise resources for the fund. This donor conference was held in Berlin in November 2014, ahead of the Paris conference. Of the \$3 billion, the US has already transferred \$1 billion – the highest amount sent from any single donor country so far. However, European Union countries, together, have already transferred more money than the US. To date, contributions made by four EU countries, Germany, France, Sweden and the UK, sum up to around \$2.1 billion:

- Germany: €375 million (around \$501 million)
- France: €247 million (around \$331 million)
- Sweden: 4 billion Swedish krona (around \$581 million)
- Great Britain: £401.7 million (around \$676 million)

Other countries have also contributed considerable sums, for example Japan with around 77 billion yen (\$750 million) and Australia with 130.7 million Australian dollars (\$122 million). Most of the large donors have agreed to make their payments in their respective currencies during the years 2015 to 2018. The distribution of funding occurs in varying tranches. This is one of the reasons that total pledges have not been transferred immediately.

Numbers on financial contributions to the GCF can be found here:

<http://>

www.greenclimate.fund/documents/20182/24868/Status_of_Pledges.pdf/eef538d3-2987-4659-8c7c-5566ed6afd19

Is the US the only country obligated to make payments to the Green Climate Fund?

Trump: “Of course, the world’s top polluters have no affirmative obligations under the Green Fund, which we terminated.”

Fact-check: False. The big emitters among the developed countries are making considerable contributions to the GCF – for example Germany (\$1 billion), France (ca. \$1 billion), the UK (ca. \$1.2 billion), Japan (\$1.5 billion), Sweden (\$580 million) and Italy (ca. \$334 million).

Trump: “[...] nobody else is even close; most of them haven’t even paid anything.”
“Many of the other countries haven’t spent anything, and many of them will never pay one dime.”

Fact-check: False. The US is the single largest contributor to the Green Climate Fund with its pledge of \$3 billion. However, if we view the US pledge in relation to population, the US is in the middle of the pack with \$9.30 per person – Germany is at \$12.30 per person, the UK at \$19.07, France at \$16.30 and Sweden at \$60.54. Developing countries and emerging economies such as Colombia, Peru, Viet Nam and Mongolia have also pledged voluntary contributions to the GCF.

Trump: “In 2015, the Green Climate Fund’s executive director reportedly stated that estimated funding needed would increase to \$450 billion per year after 2020.”

Fact-check: Misleading. The executive director of the GCF drew the cited figure of \$450 billion per year from projections of general investment needs for climate action in developing countries for the years 2010 to 2029. In her next sentence, she emphasised that the private sector would be indispensable in achieving this, making clear that the greater part of this funding is not meant to be channelled through the GCF. GCF project portfolio: <http://www.greenclimate.fund/projects/portfolio>

Is the spending of the Green Climate Fund opaque and uncontrollable?

Trump: “[...] and nobody even knows where the money is going to. Nobody has been able to say where it is going to.”

Fact-check: False. The GCF publishes transparent reports about where its money goes. The funding is spent by suitable institutions that are accredited by the GCF for specific climate action projects. These projects are evaluated using strict fiduciary, social and environmental criteria. Each project is approved by consensus by the GCF Board. The US is represented on the GCF Board.