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# Energy & the Environment

- ✓ **Would environmental policy that is strict on emission and pollution standards force industries to move abroad?**
- ✓ **How can the U.S. better enforce international climate agreements?**
- ✓ **During times of economic crisis, should the economy or the environment come first?**

## Facts

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions.**

In 2014, 6,870 million metric tons of greenhouse gases were produced in the U.S. (81% carbon dioxide, 11% methane, 6% nitrous oxide, 3% fluorinated gases). Electricity and industry are two of the most significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions at 30% and 21%, respectively. Emissions in 2014 were 9% lower than they were in 2005, but 1% higher than 2013 levels.

### **Hydraulic Fracturing.**

Also known as “fracking,” hydraulic fracturing is the process of obtaining natural gas by producing fissures in shale rock formations underground. There are over 1 million active fracking wells throughout the U.S., and the process is responsible for approximately half of both oil and natural gas production.

### **Energy Sources.**

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, in 2015, 13% of the electricity that was generated in the U.S. came from renewable sources. These sources include hydropower (46%), wind (35%), biomass wood (8%), solar (5%), biomass waste (3%) and geothermal energy (3%). The remaining electricity generation came from non-renewable sources such as petroleum (1%), natural gas (33%), nuclear (20%) and coal (33%).

## Current U.S. Policies

### **Climate Action Plan.**

President Obama announced his Climate Action Plan in June 2013. It has three overarching goals that the president hopes can be achieved within the next two decades. The first is the reduction of carbon pollution, including a plan to cut emissions by

3 billion metric tons by 2030 through energy efficiency measures. The second objective involves anticipating and preparing for the environmental consequences of climate change, to be achieved through federal allocation of information and resources to vulnerable areas. Finally, the plan seeks to establish a global leadership role for the U.S. in addressing climate change. The signing of the Paris Climate Agreement was a victory for the Obama administration in this last respect.

### ***Paris Agreement.***

The Paris Agreement was signed by many of the world's countries following the COP21 meeting in Paris, and the U.S. agreed to ratify it in the lead up to the G20 Summit in China. The agreement attempts to limit greenhouse gas emissions starting in 2020. The central goal is the limitation of global average temperature increases to less than 2° Celsius (36° Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, the year for which is set at 1880.

Governments also agreed to be transparent and accountable in setting and meeting emissions targets. Developed countries aimed to extend a \$100 billion annual pledge goal through 2025. This funding helps developing nations cope with the environmental impacts of climate change, and provides them with information and technology to aid in emissions reduction.

### ***Hydraulic Fracturing.***

The Obama administration began setting up federal regulations on fracking in early 2015. These regulations will only cover 100,000 oil and gas wells, and many fracking sites will remain under the jurisdiction of state legislatures. The hope is that these federal rules will set an example for state regulators to follow. The plan also calls for regular federal inspections of fracking sites to ensure that water sources are not being contaminated by chemicals involved in the extraction process.

### ***Keystone XL Pipeline.***

President Obama rejected the Keystone XL Pipeline, a proposed extension to the existing Keystone Pipeline. The original plan was approved by presidential permit under George W. Bush, and allowed Keystone to run over the U.S.-Canadian border. In this first phase, Keystone enabled more than 550,000 barrels of oil collected from the Canadian oil sands in Alberta to be sent down to the U.S. Gulf States each day, and shipped from there. Subsequent extensions have increased capacity, and, if approved, XL would have the capacity to carry 830,000 barrels daily. President Obama rejected the plan on the grounds that it did not meet his environmental standards and undermined a U.S. global leadership role in the fight against climate change.

## Candidate Positions



**Hillary Clinton** has made climate change policy a central issue in her campaign. She was quick to praise the Paris Climate Agreement, reached under the Obama administration, saying, “The Paris Agreement is testament to America’s ability to lead the world in building a clean energy future where no one is left out or left behind.” Mrs. Clinton’s plan, much like the Obama Climate Action Plan, involves cutting emissions and increasing energy production from renewable sources. She aspires to an accelerated trajectory that would see 33% of U.S. electricity produced from renewables by 2027, as opposed to the Obama administration goal of 20% by 2030. Mrs. Clinton is opposed to the Keystone XL Pipeline expansion. She is in favor of higher regulations on fracking, but sees natural gas as an intermediate stage on the road to emissions reduction.



**Donald Trump** denies manmade climate change, a position largely consistent with the GOP platform, which calls climate change policy “the triumph of extremism over common sense.” Mr. Trump frames the Obama administration’s Climate Action Plan as actively destroying American jobs. He says he would rescind all of President Obama’s climate-related executive actions, pull the U.S. out of the Paris Climate Agreement and stop all payments to UN global warming programs. He also calls for the elimination of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Of President Obama’s policies, Mr. Trump says, “These actions have denied millions of Americans access to the energy wealth sitting under our feet. . . . This is your treasure, and you—the American people—are entitled to share in the riches.” Trump is a vocal supporter of the Keystone XL Pipeline. He is in favor of fracking and vows to revitalize the coal industry, including reopening coalmines in Appalachia.

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