

C-AGG on US Withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement; and Observations from the Bonn May 2017 UNFCCC Climate Change Meeting (Part II)

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by: Debbie Reed, Executive Director, C-AGG

President Trump's announced decision last week to withdraw the US from the UNFCCC 2015 Paris Agreement dealt a blow to global efforts to combat climate change. As the world's second-largest GHG emitter (behind China), and the world's largest historical emitter, the environmental integrity of the accord and of efforts to reduce global GHG will take a hit without participation of the US. Perhaps equally as important is that, as the rules of the Paris Agreement are being developed and negotiated, the US will not be at the table; all our interests—citizens, businesses, agriculture—will be left out of the dialogue. We will lack representation in the global accord by our elected leaders in the US government. Unfortunately, the President continues to ignore the fact that his job is to represent all the US, in all forums, to meet our collective best interests, regardless of factions and outliers who might have a difference of opinion about what is in the best interests of our collective whole. It is unconscionable.

On the bright side—if there is one—the stunningly short-sighted move by the Trump Administration to withdraw has galvanized people, governments, businesses, non-profits, universities, scientists—just about all those citizens and businesses and sectors whose interests are being ignored and whose representation is now lacking—to speak up and confirm a commitment to act to combat climate change, despite our lack of government leadership. It is heartwarming and energizing to see and hear that collective and growing response happening within our borders, including from organizations and interests who may have previously been interested but not active in this fight.

International response has been similar, which is also heartening. World leaders and governments have repudiated the decision to withdraw, and have vowed to stay the course and to deflect or ignore President Trump's false and uninformed promise to negotiate a better deal for the US. Both developed and developing countries have stepped up and promised to fill the void, not only because it is in the best interests of mankind and the planet, but also because it is in everyone (else's) economic best interests to claim the global market share of clean renewable energy and transportation and development opportunities. Not that those of us who disagree with the Trump Administration are giving up—we are among the galvanized—but the domino effect of not being at the negotiating table, of not providing leadership in a global forum, of not being a welcomed or contributing partner (and indeed, skunks at the garden party?), does and will have long-term consequences for our standing, our economic interests, and our ability to readily re-engage at a later date.

I don't think we will not know for some time the true impact of this withdrawal, either to the environmental integrity of the Agreement, or to our national economic interests or world standing. I do think there will be both short- and long-term impacts to all three, however. In the meantime, states like California will continue to take up the mantle and lead us not only domestically, but

internationally. California has for years been engaging in constructive bilateral negotiations with other national and sub-national governments. Based on successes in CA, policymakers from the state are sharing strategies and approaches for what works and what doesn't, and helping other countries and states to leapfrog GHG intensive development and urbanization and energy-production approaches and to grow economies instead with climate-friendly, people-friendly, planet friendly strategies, technologies, and outcomes. Other states have also vowed to step up their own efforts, as have over 200 US mayors representing more than 54 million Americans. Many US and multinational corporations have stated intentions to continue to combat climate change.

At C-AGG, we too vow to stay the course and to continue to develop the tools and programs necessary to support US agriculture in adopting climate smart agricultural approaches that reduce GHG and improve societal and on-farm economic outcomes. We hope to continue to share the successes and the challenges of these approaches not only across the US, but also internationally. Our goal is to provide a C-AGG forum in the UNFCCC process for US agriculture and agricultural supply chain partners to showcase their efforts. As official observers to the UNFCCC, we can participate in meetings, we can hold side events, and we can generally ensure that, while we may not be at the actual negotiating table, our voices and our interests are heard by delegates and other observers. We believe there are parties to the UNFCCC that are seeking constructive US engagement and representation, and we'll help to provide that along with our many partners and colleagues who are also engaged.

Bonn May 2017 UNFCCC Climate Change Meeting

Turning briefly back to the recent negotiations in Bonn, one observation pertinent to the previous issue is the role of Non-Party Stakeholders in the UNFCCC process. A workshop on Non-Party Stakeholder Engagement was held in Bonn, with one goal being an assessment of how to enhance stakeholder engagement. Now more than ever, US stakeholder engagement is critical. The lack of US government representation leaves a void for US citizens, businesses, NGO's, and sectors—including the agricultural sector. Some of the void can and will be filled through non-Party stakeholder engagement. Unfortunately, some of the stakeholders in the workshop and in the convention are arguing against business sector participation, claiming a conflict-of-interest.

I personally believe this to be misguided and lacking in an understanding of how we might achieve the global GHG emissions reduction goals of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. Without businesses, we have no hope of meeting emissions reductions commitments. Businesses are part of the economic engines of our nations and the world, and can help transform the GHG impacts of our economies. Also, while one's own beliefs about how GHG emissions should be achieved may differ from others, good governance demands inclusiveness. Strategies to exclude a certain sector of the globe from decision-making will result in lopsided and ultimately, unsuccessful approaches to dealing with climate change.

We are all in this together, and only by tackling climate change together will be achieve succeed.