

# White House climate change meeting postponed

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The White House has postponed a Tuesday meeting to discuss whether the United States should withdraw from the landmark international climate deal struck in Paris under the Obama administration.

The White House said late Monday that the meeting would be rescheduled. This is the second time a meeting of top aides on the issue has been delayed.

Donald Trump pledged during the presidential campaign to renegotiate the accord, but he has wavered on the issue since winning the presidency. His top officials have appeared divided about what to do about the deal, under which the United States pledged to significantly reduce planet-warming carbon emissions in the coming decade.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the former chief executive of the oil company Exxon, said at his Senate confirmation hearing in January that he supports staying in the deal. But Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt has said the Paris pact "is a bad deal for America" that will cost jobs.

Ivanka Trump, who serves as an adviser to her father, was supposed to meet separately Tuesday with Pruitt and Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska. That meeting is still expected to take place, according to a White House official who requested anonymity to discuss private talks.

The Paris accord, signed by nearly 200 nations in 2015, was never

ratified by the Senate due to the staunch oppositions of Republicans. It therefore does not have the force of a binding treaty, and the United States could potentially withdraw from the deal without legal penalty.

A senior administration official said the president's inclination has been to leave the pact, but Ivanka Trump set up a review process to make sure he received information from experts in the public and private sector before a making a decision. The official requested anonymity to discuss private conversations.

As speculation continues about how Trump will handle the agreement, Tillerson is set to travel to Alaska for an Arctic Summit council this week amid concerns from other nations that the Trump administration will undermine global efforts to address climate change in the Arctic, where rising temperatures are having a disproportionate effect.

David Balton, a top U.S. diplomat who works on environmental issues, said there would be "no change" in U.S. participation even if Trump ultimately decides to pull out of the Paris pact.

"The U.S. will remain engaged in the work that the Arctic Council does on climate change throughout," Balton said Monday.

In his prior post as the elected attorney general of Oklahoma, Pruitt closely aligned himself with the needs of the state's oil and gas industry. He repeatedly sued the EPA over restrictions on extracting and burning fossil fuels. Among the regulations he opposed in court was the EPA's Clean Power Plan, which sought to place new restrictions on carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants with the goal of helping the United States meet its commitments under the Paris accord.

Like Trump, Pruitt has questioned the consensus of climate scientists that man-made carbon emissions are the primary driver of global

warming.

Over the weekend, the EPA administrator released a letter stating that under federal ethics standards he is obligated to recuse himself from legal cases he was involved with in his old job. However, in his letter Pruitt said his recusal does not extend to matters of "general applicability," such as making policy decisions involving current or future environmental regulations. The EPA contends, therefore, there is no ethical issue with Pruitt making decisions to roll back carbon limits he previously opposed in court, because those decisions affect the nation as a whole rather than just Oklahoma.

"Federal ethics rules distinguish between specific party matters such as an individual permit or lawsuit and matters that apply generally such as a nationally applicable regulation," said Kevi Minoli, the EPA lawyer who advises Pruitt on ethics issues.

High-profile supporters of the deal on Monday urged the U.S. to stay in the Paris accord. In a conference call organized by the liberal Center for American Progress, Brian Deese, a climate adviser to former President Barack Obama, said that "the race is on for which countries are going to be the 21st century clean energy super-powers."

Deese said the U.S. must decide whether to "continue to play in that race or step off the field."

Mindy Lubber, president of the nonprofit Ceres, which works with companies on sustainability issues, said that investors around the world are "eager to open their wallets to a low-carbon future."

"We must stay in Paris, we must pass on a healthy economy and a healthy environment to our children," Lubber said.

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