

Business urged to take govt role in clean energy quest

October 6 2017, by Denis Barnett



Conor Barry, of the UN Climate Change Secretariat, said governments alone would not be able to fulfill the Paris climate agreement, but would require joint initiatives from the private sector

The global fight for clean energy rests with businesses and ordinary people as governments lag behind, experts told an environmental conference in Argentina Friday ahead of a keynote speech by former US president Barack Obama.

With the US intent on leaving the Paris climate accord, former Clinton administration advisor Katie McGinty said "citizen action to demand leadership by their local legislatures, and by companies, and holding people accountable," was a key weapon in the fight to protect the environment.

"I see a real erosion of centrist, democratic regimes, not only in the United States, but in many places around the world, and boy there's no better recipe for a destroyed planet than dictatorship," she told reporters on the sidelines of the Green Economy summit in Cordoba, Argentina.

Nobel economic laureate Edmund Phelps told the conference that "governments are often reluctant to force corporations or force individuals to stop polluting, stop despoiling the environment."

People power "can bring to bear powerful pressure directly on corporations," he told the two-day event, ending Friday.

But Phelps also warned against [climate change](#) provoking "mass hysteria" and leading to over-regulation, which he said would be an "innovation killer."

"If an entrepreneur has to demonstrate to a whole bunch of government agencies that he is not going to cause any pollution, then we would lose the normal tendency of new companies and new ideas starting up."

"We must be careful in our efforts to save the planet that we do not strangle the sources that make our lives worth living," said Phelps, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2006.

Business on board

President Donald Trump's decision last June to take the United States

out of the Paris climate agreement has been a hot topic at the conference dedicated to renewable energy.

The United States is the world's second biggest producer of greenhouse gases after China and its withdrawal was seen as a body blow to the landmark 2015 agreement, which commits signatories to efforts to reduce [greenhouse gas emissions](#) that cause global warming.

Trump's predecessor Obama, who signed the accord, will address the gathering late Friday.

Conor Barry, of the UN Climate Change Secretariat, said governments alone would not be able to fulfill the Paris agreement, but would require joint initiatives from the private sector.

"For that we will create a platform to share best practices around the world and generate a space for dialogue for its implementation," he said in a video address from Geneva.

McGinty, who served as environmental advisor to former president Bill Clinton, said the role of big business was crucial, in the absence of government leadership.

"CEOs have spoken out against the United States leaving the Paris Accord, big companies like General Electric and some of our biggest companies in the United States went public and said this is the wrong decision and recommitted themselves to reducing greenhouse gas emissions."

Twenty-five US corporate giants including Apple, Google and Facebook, Unilever and Levi Strauss had publicly urged the US president to stick with the Paris agreement, arguing that it offered a chance for the United States to take the lead in clean energy.

Major American companies denounced his decision to pull out, including industrial and energy corporations, which have been working for years to reduce their carbon footprints.

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