

US renewable energy booms despite Trump vow to quit Paris deal

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The GE-Alstom Block Island Wind Farm stands off Block Island, Rhode Island, on September 22, 2016

Renewable energy continues to grow in the United States, despite US President Donald Trump's moves to dismantle clean power, deregulate industry and promote fossil fuels like coal, experts say.

Five months after Trump declared the United States would withdraw

from the 2015 Paris climate accord, the Republican leader continues to unravel the environmental legacy of his predecessor, Democrat Barack Obama.

A signature piece of Trump's strategy has been to roll back regulations, including the Obama-era Clean Power Plan, which aimed to cut US emissions from power plants for the first time.

"They are trying to put their fingers on the scale in favor of coal and other polluting fossil fuels, and trying to do things to slow down the penetration of clean, [renewable energy technologies](#), so that is the landscape," said Alden Meyer, director of strategy at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

But many state and city governments have pressed on with their fight against climate change, and the job force of those working in renewable energies continues to expand nationwide.

"The trend is very clear," added Meyer.

"To fight Trump, the investment and deployment of renewable [energy](#) and energy efficiency have continued growing."

Employment in the solar industry grew 24.5 percent in 2016 compared to a year earlier, reaching a workforce of nearly 374,000 people, according to an Energy Department report.

Traditional [fossil fuels](#) employed just 187,000 people, it said.

Employment in US [wind energy](#) rose 32 percent to nearly 102,000 people.

"The renewable energy industry is already working here," said Frank

Maisano, senior principal at Bracewell, a law and government relations firm serving the energy industry.

"Jobs are growing dramatically in both wind and solar."

With or without Trump

Solar and wind energy combined now produce 10 percent of the total electricity in the United States, according to the Energy Department.

In March, eight percent of the nation's electricity came from wind and two percent from solar.

In [states](#) like California, renewables made up an even larger proportion of electricity production.

Climate science expert Michael Mann, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, said it is possible that the United States will reach its commitment to cut emissions under the Paris accord regardless of what Trump says or does.

"There is enough progress now at the local and state level, commitment from major companies, movement toward [renewable energy](#) etc. that most pundits now think we'll reach our Paris targets with or without Trump's explicit complicity," Mann said in an email to AFP.

Elliot Diringer, an expert at the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, a non-governmental organization in Washington, agreed.

"We recently looked at the different analyses and it looks to us like even with the situation at the moment our emissions in 2025 are likely to be 14 to 18 percent below 2005," Diringer said.

Another America

Obama's goal had been to get to a 26 to 28 percent cut, added Diringer.

"There are a lot of opportunities to go further," he said, citing city and state level actions.

"We can achieve that reduction without the federal policies."

A movement called "We Are Still In" was launched in June, shortly after the announcement that the US would pull out of the 190-nation Paris deal.

Organized by billionaire New Yorker and former mayor Michael Bloomberg, it includes some 1,800 businesses and investors, 252 cities and nine states including California—America's largest—and New York.

"I think the 'We Are Still In' initiative is so important because it shows there is another side of America, it's not Trump and you don't even have to wait three or four years to engage with the real America that remains committed to Paris, that is a very important signal," said Meyer.

Numerous participants in the movement are expected to attend the 23rd UN climate conference in Bonn on Monday, and may be even more visible than members of the US delegation led by career diplomat Thomas Shannon, experts say.

"People in the US business community know that [climate change](#) is a serious issue and that international engagements are important," said Maisano.

"And I know that there are people in the Trump administration that think that as well."

According to a source close to the White House, the US pullout from Paris cannot come into effect before the end of 2020, and is far from a done deal.

"I think it remains an open question," the source said on condition of anonymity.

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