

POLITICAL DISPATCH

FROM THE PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE



The articles below are commentary on current events--intended to encourage further reflection and debate. Except for official Board statements, the viewpoints expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the Woman's National Democratic Club.

Paris Climate Accord Offers Hope for the World

The historic climate agreement approved on December 12, 2015, by 196 countries from all over the world has ambitious goals for reducing manmade emissions of greenhouse gases and heading off catastrophic climate change. Rich, poor, and developing countries have signed on to the agreement—showing agreement by most nations that climate change is real, dangerous, and in need of immediate action.

Impoverished and developing countries signed on because the developed world has committed to the goals of the agreement and to providing needed financial and technical assistance to countries with few resources of their own. U.S. leadership under President Obama and Secretary Kerry was crucial in achieving this landmark agreement

The agreement has five key goals: (1) keep the global average temperature increase at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.5 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels; (2) reduce the effects of deforestation and forest degradation, with stricter limits adopted every five years; (3) provide a variety of ways of financing these efforts; (4) address how to deal with damage from adverse weather events and other negative effects of climate change; and (5) track progress and detect shortcomings.

The Paris accord offers great hope but is only the first step on a very long path, with possibilities for slips and reversals at each juncture. The agreement lacks enforcement mechanisms and includes key language changes (e.g., from “will” to “should”) that leave plenty of room for failure to meet goals.

WNDC urges its members and friends to take strong action to support the Paris agreement: to press our elected leaders, especially to back the Clean Power Plan; participate in pro-climate organizations, rallies, and demonstrations; sign petitions; write letters; and continue to educate ourselves on steps we can each take to reduce our carbon footprint. We can—we must—do our utmost to use the significant achievement of the Paris agreement as a springboard to action for saving our planet, ourselves, and our descendants.

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The Heartland Institute: It's Not Just the Koch Brothers

Just when it seems safe to be cautiously optimistic about positive action on climate change, here come not only the Koch brothers and ALEC (the American Legislative Exchange Council) but an organization called the Heartland Institute, which describes itself as a nonprofit “think tank” promoting libertarian-based policies. One of its key issues is denial of the reality of climate change. The Institute is in reality a fossil fuel-funded front group receiving heavy contributions from these interests and using unscientific arguments and climate misinformation to push back on any and all attempts to reduce greenhouse gas production.

As the world looked forward to the climate conference in Paris with real hope for action to slow human impact on the earth's climate, the Institute held a counter-conference on December 7 “to expose the agendas and true costs of the agreement being negotiated there” (from the Institute's website). The Institute's delegation in Paris consisted of so-called “scientists and policy experts.” However, the respected scientific journal *Nature* pointed out in a July 2011 editorial that the Institute's “experts” lack credibility in climate science; they review scientific research as attorneys not scientists, and their primary purpose is “muddying the waters.” The Institute's President and CEO Joseph Bast is a high school graduate with no higher education degrees or diplomas. The Institute's chief spokesman on the environment, James Taylor, is an attorney with no climate science background.

Unsurprisingly, the Koch brothers and ALEC **are** involved in the doings of the Heartland Institute, through donations from the Koch Family Foundation, and membership in several of ALEC's task forces. Some of the Institute's leaders have promoted model legislation to roll back renewable energy sources, which fortunately has failed in every state legislature where it was introduced.

Another project being undertaken by the Institute is paying approximately \$300,000 a year (funding anonymous) to produce climate-change denial curricula for elementary schools.

With *Forbes* magazine featuring a weekly column by James Taylor, where he spreads climate misinformation, and Fox News and other media outlets providing a platform for Institute fellows, responsible citizens must not be complacent, overlooking threats posed by organizations such as the Heartland Institute. We need to call their phony arguments to account in every way possible. And we need to work hard in the coming year to elect representatives to state legislatures and to Congress who support rapid development of alternative fuels and strongly support all other efforts to reduce our carbon footprint on this fragile planet.

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