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ELLESMERE ISLAND, CANADA - MARCH 30: A section of an ice field is seen from the window of NASA's Operation IceBridge research aircraft on March 30, 2017 above Ellesmere Island, Canada. The ice fields of Ellesmere Island are retreating due to warming temperatures. NASA's Operation IceBridge has been studying how polar ice has evolved over the past nine years and is currently flying a set of eight-hour research flights over ice sheets and the Arctic Ocean to monitor Arctic ice loss aboard a retrofitted 1966 Lockheed P-3 aircraft. According to NASA scientists and the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC), sea ice in the Arctic appears to have reached its lowest maximum wintertime extent ever recorded on March 7. Scientists have said the Arctic has been one of the regions hardest hit by climate change. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

The U.S. Tips Its Hand, Showing It Will Likely Join The Global Climate Talks

by Ken Silverstein

When it comes to President Trump's thinking on climate change, the White House has put its cards on the table — that such efforts are essentially a waste of national time and treasure. However, when it comes to joining the Paris climate accord, the administration is tipping its hand and might be taking a seat at the table.

Last week, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson went to a [meeting of the Arctic Council](#) in Fairbanks, Alaska where the group signed a declaration affirming that the Arctic is warming at twice the rate of the global average. That is causing upheaval there and around the world, the communique added, necessitating global action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

"In the United States, we are currently reviewing several important policies, including how the Trump administration will approach the issue of climate change," Tillerson said in his [remarks to the council](#), which is an intergovernmental forum comprised of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States.

"We're not going to rush to make a decision. We're going to work to make the right decision for the United States," Tillerson added.

Those comments came two days after members of Trump's team was to meet to decide whether to join the climate talks. But do the statements of the Arctic Council and Tillerson contradict the president's executive orders to try and weaken rules for carbon and methane emissions?

They are, in fact, inconsistent. Despite the ambivalence, carbon emissions in the United States have been falling for the last decade while the economy here has been steadily growing for almost as long. A study performed by the [United Nations Development Program](#), meantime, says that if the goals of the Paris accord signed in December 2015 are achieved, job growth would escalate and climate risks could be averted. The key finding: economic growth would be 10%, or \$12 trillion greater by 2030.

“Global investors are eager to open their wallets to a low-carbon future, but it won’t happen without clear, stable policy signals from countries worldwide – in particular, the US government whose waffling on the Paris Climate Agreement is hugely troubling,” said Mindy Lubber, chief executive of the sustainability non-profit organization [Ceres](#).

Warming records have been set for 17 of the last 18 years, says the [National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration](#). And 2016 was the warmest ever.

The European Union, Canada and China are among the national governments in support of curbing carbon emissions. So, why is the United States so indecisive? [Corporate Accountability International](#) produced a report that concludes fossil fuel interests are intentionally trying to undercut the climate talks, many of which are based in this country.

But companies such as Berkshire Hathaway Energy, Calpine Corp., Exelon Corp., General Electric, PG&E Corp. and Royal Dutch Shell are among those voicing support for the accord. Furthermore, [365 businesses](#) that include DuPont, General Mills and Schneider Electric signed a letter asking President Trump to stick to the Paris agreement.

Many other businesses are willing to spend money to reduce their carbon emissions and to implement procedures to see that such strategies are followed up and down the supply chain as well. Doing so motivates companies to do everything from becoming more energy efficient to procuring renewable energy to buying technology to curb emissions. The [Carbon Disclosure Project](#) is lauding such companies as Cummins Inc, Nissan Motor Co. and SUEZ.

“If the U.S. stays in, some companies may find that new operational burdens will increase their cost of doing business. By how much? It’s extremely difficult to quantify in advance, but in isolation, it may be significant ...,” [Allegro Development’s](#) chief strategist Michael Hinton told this writer.

“With regard to being in favor of staying in the agreement, the argument would be that, even if there are higher financial costs,” he adds, “it’s the responsibility of corporations to be on the side of [protecting the environment](#) and to pursue new technologies that may produce considerable economic benefits.”

Corporate America will therefore become the primary force to drive forward the global climate change talks. Companies realize that to effect the outcome they can’t be isolationist or obstructionist. They, in fact, must participate in the discussions — the same view that Secretary Tillerson has espoused and the one that the president will likely heed.