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Trump's Withdrawal From the Paris Agreement Challenges Latin America

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WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's announcement on June 1 that the United States would withdraw from the Paris climate agreement was met with widespread dismay and fears that the decision would put the entire global agreement in peril. For Latin American countries, which overwhelmingly support global efforts to tackle climate change, the move will make it more difficult to meet climate objectives, and it will put a strain on relations with the United States.

Latin American countries are among the most committed to tackling climate change. About three-quarters of citizens in the region consider climate change a very serious problem, among the highest percentage in the world.

Latin American and Caribbean countries are highly vulnerable. A significant rise in global temperatures could lead to reduced arable land, the loss of low-lying islands and coastal regions, and more extreme weather events in many of these countries. Latin America holds one-third of the world's freshwater and almost 30 percent of potential new arable land, making it an important center for global food production. Many urban centers — 60 of the 77 largest cities in the region — are situated along coasts, and Caribbean islands are susceptible to rising sea levels that would damage infrastructure and contaminate freshwater wetlands. Central America, the Caribbean and eastern Mexico are threatened with a growing frequency of high-intensity tropical storms. In South America, climate change already appears to be altering rainfall patterns and increasing glacier melt, threatening watersheds that supply water for drinking, agricultural production and hydropower to tens of millions of people.

Already 25 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have ratified the accord. Costa Rica made the most ambitious pledge and was one of the few countries in the world to commit its share of emissions reductions to meet the accord's goal of keeping the rise in the planet's average temperature below 2 degrees Celsius.

Meeting these targets will be a challenge. Rapidly growing car ownership, fuel subsidies and lack of incentives for efficient cars and electric vehicles make the transport sector the fastest-growing source of emissions in Latin America. After a decline in deforestation rates, the region has seen a recent uptick, most notably in Brazil's Amazon region. Growing electricity demand is also driving an increase in emissions, especially in countries where energy generation is primarily coal- or oil-based, such as

Mexico, while increasingly frequent droughts and strong opposition to hydroelectric dams have made clean hydropower less reliable.

and support will be critical for Latin American and Caribbean countries' ability to fulfill their Paris commitments and to ratchet up their pledges in the future, as climate negotiators intended. Emissions reduction plans developed by many countries, including Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, involved both unconditional commitments and more ambitious pledges that countries agreed to meet on the condition of technology transfer and international finance.

Under the previous United States administration, climate change and clean energy were major areas of international cooperation. In 2014, President Barack Obama committed \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund, which helps poor countries fight and adapt to climate change. The fund was a key compromise in Paris to get developing countries on board despite industrialized nations' greater historical responsibility for carbon emissions. Mr. Obama transferred \$1 billion to the fund while in office.

But the Trump administration is already moving to completely eliminate climate change funding. Mr. Trump's budget blueprint drops support for the Global Climate Change Initiative and payments to United Nations climate change programs. And in his June 1 announcement, the president reiterated that the United States would no longer make its pledged payments to the Green Climate Fund.

President Trump's decision to withdraw from the climate pact seems to be part of a broader policy of disengagement from international affairs that will ultimately hurt the United States' relationships with Latin American countries. Mr. Trump's "America first" foreign policy ostensibly aims to strengthen American interests and national security, and Mr. Trump has indicated he will prioritize defense over international cooperation. The president's budget, presented to Congress on May 16, proposes to cut funding to the State Department by 30 percent compared with the previous year while increasing military spending.

For now, many of the Obama administration's clean-energy initiatives with Latin America and the Caribbean remain in place. Clean-energy-related assistance to Central America and the Caribbean, part of larger aid packages already approved by Congress, appear to be on track. The United States is also still planning to participate in the ministerial meeting of the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas — an Obama administration initiative — in Chile in September. But proposed budget cuts, combined with the decision to pull out of Paris, put into question how long this cooperation will continue. The lack of appointments to key senior leadership positions on Latin America — for example, Mr. Trump has not nominated a new assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs at the State Department — also inhibit the administration's ability to take a proactive approach to engagement with the region. The lack of leadership on both Western Hemisphere affairs and climate change issues in the administration undermine cooperation with the United States' allies in the region.

After Mr. Trump's announcement, many Latin American leaders condemned the United States' decision to leave the Paris accord and vowed to meet their climate change targets nevertheless. With the dramatic fall in renewable energy costs and gains in energy efficiency, clean energy is often more cost-effective anyway. However, meeting the global challenges of fighting and adapting to climate change requires global cooperation, and the United States' decision to withdraw from this international partnership will damage its standing with Latin America and the rest of the world.