



# Harvard Model Congress Boston 2023

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## THE US AND THE UN FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC)

*By Kyle Felter*

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*Image of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where the UNFCCC was drafted.*

*United Nations*

**Greenhouse gases**  
– gases that absorb and trap heat in the atmosphere, such as carbon dioxide

According to the United Nations, the Earth is 1.1°C (~34°F) warmer than in the 1800s.

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### INTRODUCTION

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Every second, natural processes impact life on Earth as we know it. One accelerating trend, although not entirely natural, is climate change. Recent scientific estimates have found that **greenhouse gases** have reached their highest concentrations in our atmosphere in over two million years (“Climate Action”, 2022). The more worrying reality, however, is that concentrations continue to rise despite international attempts to curtail these pervasive developments.

A prominent example of the international community’s attempt to reduce climate change’s global impact is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC, which gained legal force in 1994 and now has 197 country parties, aims to propel climate change discussions, programmatic intervention, and impact evaluation to monitor individual member states’ progress toward reducing global temperature changes (“History”, 2022).

Ultimately, proposing solutions toward combatting climate change is both a domestic and international issue. The United States (U.S.), however, represents 11% of global emissions, a number that is disproportionately higher per capita than other developed countries (Newburger, 2021). This statistic means the US is the second-highest global emitter behind China (Newburger, 2021). Even though global emissions declined slightly due to the pandemic, many countries are once again nearing their pre-2019 emission levels, a backward trend that undermines the goals of environmental agreements like the

**Sovereignty** – the idea that a nation should be able to govern itself without foreign interference

UNFCCC (Henson, 2022). Given the gravity of the situation, and the US’ unique stake, it is imperative the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis ideates solutions related to the UNFCCC’s framework to challenge the rising threat of climate change.

## EXPLANATION OF THE ISSUE

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### *Historical Development*

**Kyoto Protocol** – international treaty aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in developed countries

The UNFCCC became open for state ratification in 1992, eventually entering into force in 1994 (“Climate Change”, 2022). At the summit where the UNFCCC was drafted, President George H.W. Bush achieved Senate ratification of the Convention later that year (“History”, 2022). When most of the international community joined the Convention a few short years after its drafting, member states called for additional, stricter climate-related treaties and protocols. The UNFCCC then became a parent treaty to two other fundamental treaties that aim to mitigate the impacts of climate change worldwide, explained below.

China and India, now two of the world’s largest polluters, were not included in the Kyoto Protocol as “developed” countries.

#### Kyoto Protocol

In 1995, many countries advocated for a legally binding agreement to transform countries’ commitments into concrete action. The **Kyoto Protocol**, and its accompanying Doha Amendment, integrated several market controls, assigned emissions caps to each country, and extended over two periods (i.e., 2008-2012 and 2013-2020) (“Kyoto”, 1997). This Protocol was rather narrow in its focus, however, because it specifically called on the most economically developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, excluding developing countries (“US-Centric, 2013). This was the major reason the US did not ratify the Protocol. This inaction sent an intense signal to the world. When a large economy like the US chose not to ratify the Protocol, this resulted in a significant blow to the treaty’s legitimacy in the eyes of developed and developing countries alike.

**Paris Climate Agreement** – international treaty aimed at reducing global warming

#### Paris Agreement

**Executive agreement** – action taken by the President to join a treaty without congressional approval

The most recent development occurred in 2015 when UNFCCC parties adopted the **Paris Climate Agreement**. This treaty’s main goal is to “limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius” (“Paris”, 2015). Like the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement is binding. The Agreement, however, among other nuanced differences, grants more flexibility to states to craft their own emission reduction goals. Although President Obama ratified the Agreement through an **executive agreement** without Senate ratification in 2016, President Trump withdrew the US from the Agreement in 2020 mainly due to **sovereignty** and economic

concerns (McGrath, 2020). The actual time the US remained outside of the Paris Agreement was short-lived, however, since President Biden rejoined the Paris Agreement in January 2021 (Blinken, 2021).

## *Scope of the Problem*

### Climate Change's Diverse Impacts

The first issue related to the US's role in the UNFCCC is the multifaceted impact climate change has on the country. Rising temperatures have a variety of negative impacts on natural ecosystems and processes including but not limited to higher sea levels, increased rainfall, worsened air quality, and prolonged droughts. The **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** has collected climate data for decades, finding that climate change's accelerating trends have impacted various facets of the US landscape. For instance, climate change has worsened health outcomes. The EPA found that climate change's worsening impacts on air quality are connected to a rise in premature mortality rates, respiratory issues, and extreme temperature mortality incidences nationally ("Health", 2015). In addition, climate change and its impacts are disastrous for the national economy. The EPA found that decreased water quality due to climate-induced developments has cost the US roughly \$3 billion ("Health", 2015).

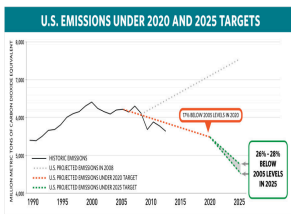
Although human-induced causes have quickened climate change, the US agrees with the international community that mitigating global temperatures should be the overarching goal for many reasons. In the US specifically, the EPA estimates that preventing thousands of premature deaths could save the country \$160 billion come 2050 ("Health", 2015). Investing in the present also supports the longevity of the nation even further into the future. For example, the EPA estimates that halting further escalation in temperatures can save the nation 1.2 billion labor hours and \$110 billion in wages by 2100 ("Health", 2015). In other words, reducing the harmful impacts of climate change by investing in solutions that aim to curtail rising global temperatures can ensure a country's prosperity economically, politically, and socially in the short and long terms.

### UNFCCC Goals within the Domestic Sphere

The evolution of the UNFCCC compared to when the Convention entered the global community in 1992 highlights the international community's investment in the ability of each member state to understand its unique climate needs and capabilities to confront climate change. While the UNFCCC's most recent Paris Agreement serves to institute more specific climate-related goals overall, the Agreement also grants significant autonomy to states in the form of **nationally-determined contributions (NDCs)**. The Agreement calls for each state to publish its emissions goals and progress every

***Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*** – created in 1970, the executive agency tasked with protecting the environment in the U.S.

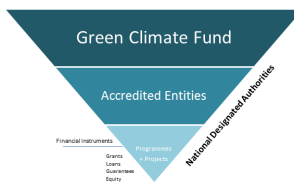
***Nationally-determined contributions (NDCs)*** – a climate target plan submitted by a country to the Paris Agreement



*This graph highlights that the U.S. plans to emit 26-28% fewer emissions compared to 2005 levels by 2025.*

*The White House*

**Green Climate Fund** – established in 2010, one of the Paris Agreement’s financial mechanisms aimed at assisting developing countries’ development of climate change mitigation strategies



*This is a simplified graphic of the Green Climate Fund’s operational structure.*

*Green Climate Fund*

five years (“Nationally”, 2015). After formally rejoining the Agreement, the US published its NDC for 2020. In this pledge, the country announced its revamped climate policy that aims to “cut the US’ greenhouse gas emissions by 50% compared to its 2005 levels by 2030” (Plumer & Popovich, 2021). This is a significant pledge that tied the US closer to the original UNFCCC framework and will certainly necessitate more investment on the domestic level.

While the US currently expresses a clear understanding that climate change has many adverse impacts, there has been a general lack of concrete action on the domestic level. The United Nations Environment Program found that even when the U.S was a party to the Paris Agreement before Trump’s withdrawal, the country was unlikely to meet its emissions targets established in 2015 and 2020 (“Emissions Gap Report”, 2021). Although President Biden announced his new climate stance, more bipartisan collaboration and committee debate on the domestic level is necessary to close this gap in rhetoric and actuality.

## Supporting Developing Countries

The international community has long rightfully understood that climate change impacts all countries, regardless of developmental status. International actors have, accordingly, also acknowledged that not all countries have the financial ability to invest in climate resiliency technologies to combat climate change. Hence, the Paris Agreement called for renewed commitments to the **Green Climate Fund**, an effort that calls for developed countries to collectively send \$100 billion to developing countries annually (“Climate Finance”, 2015). In 2016, President Obama pledged \$3 billion to the Fund, but only sent a third of the pledge when he left office in 2016 (Aizenman, 2017). President Trump then announced in 2017 his plans to stop all US financial contributions to the Fund (Aizenman, 2017). Acquiescing to the international community’s desires, President Biden recommitted the US to the Fund in 2021, announcing the US will contribute \$11.4 billion by 2024 to propel climate-related action (Cinnamon, 2021). Once again, pledges do not necessarily equate to sustained action. For example, Congress only recently approved a \$1 billion delivery for 2022, an unencouraging development in terms of the current pledge (Farand, 2022). This lack of congressional support for the President’s plans begs the question: why do some voting officials reject this idea?

The simple answer is that opponents of the Green Climate Fund reject monetarily supporting distant countries’ climate policies. President Trump, in justification of his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, once stated that the Green Climate Fund would require the US “[to pay] billions and billions and billions of dollars and we’re [the US] already way ahead of anybody else” (Varinsky, Mosher & Schwartz, 2017). All things considered, the future of the US and its

potential to financially commit to one of the most potentially transformative instruments under the UNFCCC remains uncertain.

## *Congressional Action*

Although the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis was formed in 2019, one of its core issues quickly became those related to international climate negotiations and their impact on the US domestic landscape. For example, the Committee specifically articulates calls for the US to adhere to its Green Climate Fund commitments (“Issues”, 2022). Due to its relative infancy, the Committee has mainly addressed climate change through a series of committee reports and meetings. In one case, the committee held hearings in 2019 on the importance of switching to more renewable energy to meet the US’s growing energy needs, especially plans related to wind and solar energy (“Solving”, 2019). In addition, the committee has acknowledged the power of the youth and **non-governmental organizations** in propelling environmental sustainability, including a hearing with climate activist Greta Thunberg (“Voices”, 2019). Recent hearings in 2022 have included discussions with industry leaders on how to promote clean energy usage specifically among domestic manufacturers, especially automakers (“Manufacturing”, 2022). In essence, the committee’s current effort highlights a multi-stakeholder effort to discuss ways to halt climate change.

When it comes to sharing specific climate resiliency strategies with other national actors in a single package, the action of this select committee is worth mentioning. In June 2020, Democrat members of the committee unveiled a “Congressional Action Plan for a Clean Energy Economy and a Healthy, Resilient, and Just America” that aims to bolster jobs within clean energy, promote environmental justice, and protect US natural sites, including through collaboration with indigenous leaders (“Tracking”, 2022). At the time of writing this briefing, Congress has placed 201 of the 715 recommendations set out in this action plan into law (“Tracking”, 2022). This plan represents the most comprehensive action of the committee to date. That said, the plan also highlights how Congress tends to view climate change via an economic lens to foster bipartisan support.

## *Other Policy Action*

Since climate change is global in scope and relies on multilateral agreements like the UNFCCC to promote collaboration, much policy action has occurred on the international level besides treaties under the parent convention. Other congressional committees and US-based bodies have acted under the UNFCCC’s framework. For example, several House committees endorsed the passage of H.Res. 109, known as the “Green New Deal”. This extensive piece of

**Non-governmental organizations** – a group independent of the government that provides services on behalf of members, with nonprofits and fundraising as examples

According to committee members, the Climate Crisis Action Plan would help the U.S. achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and \$8 trillion in health and climate benefits.

**Soft commitment** – an action that gives a country more leeway when abiding by a treaty’s stipulations compared to outright ratification, which binds a country more closely to the treaty

legislation aimed to transform the U.’ socio-economic landscape by investing in local communities, climate-resilient infrastructure, and sustained job growth in the clean energy sector (H Res 109). While the Resolution had strong support in the House, the legislation failed to pass in the Senate (Grandoni & Sonmez, 2019). This did not terminate the desire for massive climate reform, however. Though the initial Resolution entered discourse in 2019, a refined version was proposed in 2022 (H.Res. 332). While the bill remains in the introduction stage at the time of writing this briefing, the public’s eyes are fixed on its future as well as a variety of other legislation the Green New Deal has inspired since 2019 (Dalzell, 2021).

Other Congressional developments related to climate change are also worthy of mention. In 2016, Representatives Ted Deutch (D-FL-22) and Carlos Curbelo (R-FL-26) formed the House Climate Solutions Caucus, the first bipartisan effort at actualizing climate solutions (“Climate”, 2019). Three years later, in 2019, a Senate Climate Solutions Caucus counterpart was formed (“Climate”, 2019). Although the meeting and legislation frequency of these two representative bodies is sparse, they have published several public briefings on the need to balance the interests of the US’ domestic economic stakeholders and the US’ international obligations as it relates to climate solutions. For example, the Senate version of the caucus met with European Union officials in 2020 to discuss methods of cooperation to reduce both countries’ respective greenhouse gas emissions (“Climate Solutions Caucus”, 2020). At their most basic levels, these types of congressional efforts highlight a willingness to experiment with new governing bodies to devise concrete climate strategies.

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## IDEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINTS

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### *Conservative View*

Generally, conservatives are known to question the scientific reliability and practicality of numerous climate change mitigation strategies. Along with this logic, the official Republican Party platform holds that climate change is “far from [the US’s] most pressing national security issue” (“Republican”, 2016). As such, it is unsurprising that conservatives generally agree that the UNFCCC should remain **soft commitments** unless the treaties are ratified by Congress. While conservatives hold differing opinions over exact climate policies, the party broadly agrees that economic concerns should triumph over environmental ones, especially in terms of treaties that impose regulations on domestic industries like the Paris Agreement (“Republican”, 2016). Along with this, conservative voters themselves hold distinct views on the US as it relates to the

nation's action on the international stage, including its participation in UNFCCC treaties. A 2021 Gallup poll found that only 31% of Republicans believe the U.S. should take lead in combatting climate change and only 16% believed climate change is a 'critical threat' to the country (Smeltz, Sullivan & Wolff, 2021). This finding means that conservatives believe the US should take a secondary, and often unilateral, role in the fight for reducing climate change.

All this said, conservatives sometimes tend to stray from the party's core platform centered on economic efficiency. This fluidity in individual conservative representatives and groups, such as the Citizens' Climate Lobby, underscores the importance of understanding the wide range of conservative perspectives on climate change ("Conservative", 2022).

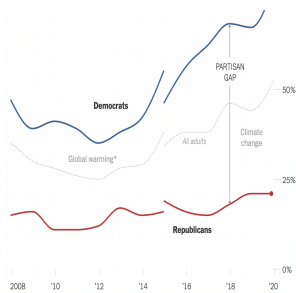
## *Liberal View*

Broadly, liberals praise the scientific credibility and specificity of climate mitigation studies and recommended strategies. The Democratic Party has long labelled climate change a "global emergency" that is worthy of substantive international and US-led action that balances economic concerns and environmental sustainability ("Combating", 2020). For Democrats, this often takes the form of the US leading climate negotiations. In contrast to President Trump's "America First" ideology, liberals believe in a foreign policy strategy based on international unity to confront issues like climate change ("Renewing", 2020). In the same 2021 Gallup poll referenced earlier, 81% of Democrats believed that the US should be the leader in climate talks and 82% felt that climate change is a 'critical threat' (Smeltz, Sullivan & Wolff, 2021). This ideological difference means that liberals believe the US should be the main drafter of multilateral agreements to inspire action against climate change.

Democrats have a rich history of fighting for climate change mitigation strategies. One example we analyzed already was the Green New Deal, whose main proponents were all members of the Democratic Party. Another example occurred in late 2021 when House Democrats garnered enough support to pass the U.S.'s largest climate investment package of \$555 billion under President Biden's "**Build Back Better Act**" (Newburger, 2022; H.R. 5376). While the status of this package remains to be seen in the Senate, the passing of such a comprehensive piece of legislation is worth acknowledging.

## AREAS OF DEBATE

As the main strategic body of the House of Representatives with the sole aim of actualizing solutions to halt climate change, the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis has the vested power



*This graph highlights the growing partisan divide over whether climate change should be a top policy concern for the federal government.*

*Pew Research Center*

**Build Back Better Act** – a broad piece of federal legislation proposed in 2021 that calls for additional funding and program creation for areas like education, healthcare, and the climate

to implement various approaches to recommit the US to the UNFCCC. The solutions range from amending the Paris Agreement to implementing domestic solutions that adhere to the general framework of the UNFCCC and its subsidiary treaties. While representatives of both parties may be able to find common ground in their assessments of the threat level of climate change, any solution this committee undertakes, international or domestic in scope, will require compromise by both parties.

## *Propose Amendments to the Paris Agreement*

One of the most applicable solutions to reinvigorating the US' commitment to the UNFCCC is for the country to propose amendments to the Paris Agreement at climate summits like the upcoming COP-27 conference in Egypt. To do so, the nation can use the now-expired Kyoto Protocol as inspiration. As explained earlier, like the economic rebuttals used by President Trump in 2016 to justify his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, President George W. Bush similarly drew on supposed economic repercussions for developed countries to justify non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol (Borger, 2001). The Select Committee on the Climate Crisis could conduct meetings and develop reports on the efficacy of proposing changes to the Paris Agreement's structure. For example, proposed amendments might target potential weak points like the absence of noncompliance penalties. Proponents of this solution argue that the Kyoto Protocol lost much of its international legitimacy due to the US' reluctance to ratify. By making changes to the improved Paris Agreement, proponents could argue that this action will send a strong message that the US is ready to tackle climate change by providing the UNFCCC improved mechanisms to ensure international adherence. Opponents of this solution, in contrast, hold that such improvements will place an undue burden on developed countries like the US, especially if noncompliance penalties are adopted.

According to the United Nations, amendments to the Paris Agreement would require no member states to disagree, otherwise known as a consensus. If there is disagreement, the amendment can pass with a 3/4 majority vote.

## Political Perspectives on this Solution

Those belonging to the Democratic Party tend to believe that, although the Kyoto Protocol contained strict emission standards and the Paris Agreement eliminated some of its compliance-assurance features, the US must be held accountable for the emissions targets it sets out to achieve. Individuals abiding by this ideology argue that noncompliance penalties may still represent an effective oversight mechanism. Therefore, Democrats prefer greater international collaboration and coordination against any loopholes in domestic climate solutions. In contrast, Republicans generally view such mechanisms in both the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement as inherently unfair to the US, looking down on any attempt to tie the hands of the federal government through international oversight.



Similarly, Republicans also tend to oppose expending federal resources for the purposes of meeting internationally managed emission targets.

## *Reassess Corporate Disclosure of Emissions*

By increasing US financial regulators’ awareness of their impact on climate change, the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis can better align the goals of climate mitigation strategies and the corporate realm to the framework of the UNFCCC and its underlying treaties. In the status quo, there is little consensus on which emissions corporations should be required to report annually (“Companies”, 2022). Accordingly, this solution could take the form of the committee recommending that public and private financial regulators, like the Federal Reserve, join climate coalitions and report specific types of emissions at regular cadences. In doing so, financial regulators can gain access to third-party oversight and assistance to manage investments to ensure they reduce climate-related risks. Supporters of this solution hold that climate change will negatively impact the financial system for years to come. Consequently, proponents call for regulators’ action in the present to mitigate future repercussions. If financial regulators are required to disclose their investments and climate-related performance, supporters also believe this may put public pressure on these public and private actors to better their **corporate social responsibility** practices. On the other hand, opponents of this solution argue that such disclosure requirements may cause corporations to become more inefficient, which may translate to job loss or economic harm. In addition, there are fears that disclosure requirements may result in third-party actors entangling themselves with private sector businesses, undermining the idea of the “**invisible hand**.”

### Political Perspectives on this Solution

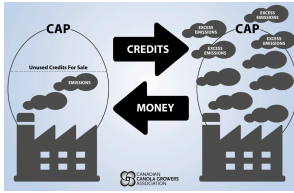
Any financial regulator in the US should recognize that it has a role to play in the sustainability of the financial market. This shared goal means there is likely equal ground available for Democrats and Republicans to act. Partisan divide, however, impedes agreements on the mechanism and frequency of financial disclosures as it relates to climate change mitigation strategies. Since Republicans tend to be more fiscally conservative than Democrats, it is important that any processes related to disclosure and reporting do not outweigh the financial benefits of doing so in the first place.

## *Honor Promises to the Green Climate Fund*

The US has a unique ability to harness the power of the Green Climate Fund and encourage developing countries to invest in climate resiliency due to its international standing. However, the US’

**Corporate social responsibility** – a business strategy that seeks to maximize a company’s financial, social, and environmental goals

**Invisible hand** – proposed by economist Adam Smith in 1759, the idea that the economy thrives best when individuals act on their interests, with minimal government interference



*This image depicts the high-level functioning of a cap-and-trade system.*

*Canadian Canola Growers Association*

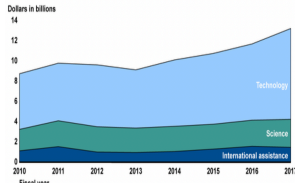
encouragement only holds weight if the country confidently commits to its pledges to the Green Climate Fund at home. Although the Special Presidential Envoy for the US has voiced the country's intention to remain an "indispensable player" in supporting the Fund, the truth is that the country still lags behind in its financial commitments ("US Climate", 2021). Honoring promises could take the form of the Select Committee spearheading efforts to draw out plans for where this money will come from and which public and private actors the government could enlist to keep itself accountable, such as the EPA. Additionally, these recommendations could elucidate specific funding milestones for the federal government to meet its \$11.4 billion pledge per year by 2024 (Cinnamond, 2021). Proponents of this solution believe that meeting our Fund commitments will improve the US' international image by highlighting investment in meeting domestic targets and inspiring international commitments among other nations. Opponents, however, argue that Congress will have to cut funding from other domestic programs to pool monetary resources for the Fund, and could potentially raise taxes on a significant portion of the US population to do so.

## Political Perspectives on this Solution

Since conservatives usually stray away from actions that involve government spending on internationally stipulated financial funds, they are likely to feel impassioned about resisting this solution. Generally, those holding a conservative ideology also dislike the prospect of an international committee overseeing how federal dollars are sent to developing countries like the board of the Green Climate Fund. On the other hand, Democrats widely believe in creating national standards that promote equality and safeguard everyone's constitutional right to vote free of any political interests or unfair barriers, thus galvanizing a liberal pull for this solution.

## *Market-Based Solutions*

Improving the US' international image by honoring its UNFCCC commitments is only one part of the larger discussion around the nation limiting its negative impact on the climate. As explained earlier, the US remains one of the largest greenhouse gas emitters per capita, yet new reforms in private industries are slowly being implemented. In response to such lackluster remedies, the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis can propose revamped market-based climate change solutions. One potential solution is the introduction of a minimal carbon tax, a proposal that would involve the imposition of a per-ton – or other per-unit metric – tax on polluters that utilize greenhouse gases to operate. Another potential solution is cap-and-trade, which essentially sets limits on the amount of emissions private and public actors can produce and grants these



*This graph shows the rise in federal expenditures on climate technology, science, and international assistance from 2010-2017.*

*Government Accountability Office*

**Gross domestic product** – the total value of goods and services produced in a country each year

**Discretionary spending** – expenditures on optional items annually through appropriations bills

same actors the opportunity to purchase additional emission rights from other companies. Supporters believe these solutions transfer the burden of environmental degradation to those actors responsible: corporations. In doing so, supporters believe market-based solutions such as the two explained earlier incentivize private corporations to undertake sustainable energy alternatives. Opponents, however, believe that such remedies will introduce yet another burden on the private market, resulting in lower economic efficiency and a potentially negative impact on the country's **gross domestic product**.

## Political Perspectives on this Solution

Democrats strongly favor policies that regulate private and public industries since these actors are major contributors to the climate crisis. Since Democrats tend to favor a top-bottom government model and greater government oversight, those of a liberal ideology favor approaches that tie the activities of corporations closer to the government as it relates to reducing climate change. However, increasing federal regulation of financial regulators in the form of additional taxation undermines the tenets of conservatism, namely the idea that the government should refrain from intruding into private markets. Similarly, conservatives may believe that such market-based solutions are susceptible to market manipulation.

## *Invest in Research and Development*

Despite the lack of agreement in Congress on comprehensive climate change legislation, the government has access to a federal budget that increasingly calls for climate-related research financing. For example, the Government Accountability Office reported that, from 1993 to 2014, the government's funding for 'climate science' increased from only \$1.31 billion to \$2.66 billion (Haapala, 2016). While a modest increase, the federal government is showing signs of committing to additional climate-related investment. Take, for instance, the inclusion of \$44.9 billion in **discretionary spending** for the climate in President Biden's presidential budget ("President", 2022). With an upward trajectory in federal funding for climate change, the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis can convene meetings and hearings to form recommendations on which industries, alternative energy sources, and third-party climate advocacy groups to support to drive climate research and development. Supporters of this solution believe that additional research can make lower-cost energy alternatives cheaper to implement, undermining contemporary arguments against such solutions as economically infeasible. Extreme opponents of additional research and development, however, take a skeptical approach to climate science, arguing that research findings on the anthropogenic accelerants are uncredible, instead deferring to more

natural causes. More moderate opponents may hold that the government has more pressing national security issues to address, such as poverty and job loss accelerated by the pandemic, rather than international climate considerations.

### Political Perspectives on this Solution

Most Democrats support initiatives for bolstering certain government programs that investigate the feasibility of clean energy and other climate resiliency-promoting strategies. However, most Republicans would be wary of decreeing additional federal dollars towards climate research especially if the research supports reforms that are not market-tested. While there is public support for policy action against climate change, some extreme conservative legislators may conjure oppositional backlash, arguing that the federal government is wasting its resources on a politically motivated campaign centered on hyperbolizing the severity of climate change (Gross, 2021).

## BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

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The major budgetary concerns for the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis are administrative costs. Such costs would apply if the committee decided to research and publish reports on policy proposals ranging from amendments to the Paris Agreement to investigating the feasibility of market-based mechanisms like a carbon tax and initiating investigations into a certain number of states. If the committee were to create new research ventures using federal dollars, additional financial costs such as the systemization of grant programs and wages for federal employees to monitor such programs would likely incur operational costs. Finally, if the committee advocated for the government to honor its international financial obligations to the Green Climate Fund, such funding may have to come from ancillary federal sources. On the other hand, the promising trends in Presidential Administration's willingness to fund climate-related activities represent an opportunity for this committee to generate effective change in combating the growing climate threat.

## CONCLUSION

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The future of America's international legitimacy as it relates to the climate starts in the domestic sphere. Recommitting to international treaties like the UNFCCC is a potential first step; however, failure to meet the country's own set NDC and financial promises to the Green Climate Fund contradicts the nation's current

promotion of acting against climate change. Now is the time to compromise between past missteps on the climate, current commitments to the international community, and future policy reforms that turn these commitments into action. Representatives can, and are encouraged to, combine and rework many of the previously stated solutions into others. However, just as climate change has a diverse array of impacts on our planet, sometimes solutions to the crisis will require more unique solutions. The delegates of the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis must leverage their powers to advance policies that reduce climate change's rising threat level to the nation and globe.

### GUIDE TO FURTHER RESEARCH

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Delegates should stay up to date on the US' stance on multilateral climate treaties under the UNFCCC and other bilateral treaties that discuss the environment. Delegates should also stay informed about other countries' recent changes in environmentally-friendly policies, especially those policies which regulate industrial activities—delegates can seek inspiration from these policies for their own legislation during committee. Delegates should start their research by using the sources in this briefing. For additional information, regularly check reputable sites such as Congress.gov for the most current legislative actions on climate change between now and Harvard Model Congress 2023 as political party coalitions, debates, and the climate threat itself evolve daily. Finally, as President Biden's Administration redirects the nation after the prior administration's withdrawal from fundamental environmental accords, delegates should pay attention to the activities of environmental advocacy groups that may work with the current Administration to inspire potential legislation in committee. Finally, delegates are recommended to research how their assigned representative works with such interest groups to ideate policy recommendations and possible methods of coordination between various actors during the conference.

### GLOSSARY

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**Build Back Better Act** – a broad piece of legislation proposed in 2021 that calls for additional funding and program creation for areas like education, healthcare, and the climate

**Corporate social responsibility** – a business strategy that seeks to maximize a company's financial, social, and environmental goals

**Discretionary spending** – expenditures on optional items annually through appropriations bills

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** – created in 1970, the executive agency tasked with protecting the environment in the US

**Executive agreement** – action taken by the President to join a treaty without congressional approval

**Green Climate Fund** – established in 2010, one of the Paris Agreement’s financial mechanisms aimed at assisting developing countries’ development of climate change mitigation strategies

**Greenhouse gases** – gases that absorb and trap heat in the atmosphere, such as carbon dioxide

**Gross domestic product** – the total value of goods and services produced in a country each year

**Invisible hand** – proposed by economist Adam Smith in 1759, the idea that the economy thrives best when individuals act on their interests, with minimal government interference

**Kyoto Protocol** – international treaty related to the UNFCCC aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in developed countries

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