

# AN ALL-IN NATIONAL CLIMATE STRATEGY TO DELIVER AMBITIOUS, ROBUST, AND CREDIBLE U.S. ACTION

Nate Hultman,<sup>1</sup> Kevin Kennedy,<sup>2</sup> Tom Cyrs,<sup>2</sup> Wendy Jaglom,<sup>3</sup> Carla Frisch,<sup>3</sup> Leon Clarke,<sup>1</sup> Andrew Light<sup>2</sup>

**The next year presents a critical opportunity for addressing the climate crisis with a concerted global effort that integrates international, national, and non-federal actions. Re-engaged federal leadership from the United States will be a critical component of this global effort. In this context, a credible and ambitious U.S. national climate target or Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) will require a plausible path for achieving new and ambitious targets. An “all-in” national climate strategy that fuses new, federally driven actions with enhanced non-federal actions will be essential to deliver U.S. emissions reductions in line with global goals. Building non-federal action into a new U.S. NDC will require rapid development of new approaches and institutional structures that meaningfully link actions into an integrated planning process across all actors.**

## AN ALL-IN STRATEGY FOR U.S. CLIMATE ACTION

Setting the global emissions trajectory on a path to reach scientifically informed climate goals—in line with warming under 1.5 degrees C—will require major steps on climate action in 2021. Across the world, key emitters are currently assessing new emissions reduction opportunities and sharing details of new and, in some cases, more ambitious climate strategies and targets. In this critical moment, renewed and reinvigorated U.S. national climate leadership is essential to boost global ambition.

The Biden-Harris Administration, therefore, faces the task of building a new economy with broadly shared prosperity, jobs, and health that can also deliver significant emissions reductions. Supporting this vision, the U.S. has in recent years created a significant, robust basis for expanded climate action from the non-federal leadership of states, cities, businesses, and others. These actors alone represent roughly 70% of U.S. GDP, equivalent to the world's second-largest economy. The new administration can leverage this substantial momentum from recent non-federal climate actions to support international credibility, higher ambition, and effective, robust, long-term implementation.

Delivering the highest levels of climate action in the years ahead that are in line with science and global expectations for action will be challenging and cannot be done by the federal government alone. But achieving it will be possible by rapidly building an “all-in” national climate strategy for the United States. Analysis from America's Pledge has shown that non-federal action has not only driven significant U.S. emissions reductions—even without the federal government—but also provides a foundation for federal re-engagement.<sup>4</sup> Our analysis also demonstrated that linking ambitious action from the federal government with expanded action by states, cities, and businesses can deliver U.S. reductions approaching 50% by 2030. Such an “all-in” climate strategy can maximize action from all levels of government in our federal system,<sup>5</sup> layering ambitious and energetic federal leadership onto these recent non-federal actions. Such a strategy roots long-term action and higher ambition in local communities, political structures, and organizations.

## AN ALL-IN U.S. STRATEGY SUPPORTS HIGHER GLOBAL ACTION

Limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees C will require rapid and broad decarbonization across the global economy, in line with roughly a 50% reduction in overall global emissions by 2030. Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, countries are required to develop NDCs that demonstrate their strategy for helping achieve the goals of the Agreement. Countries around the world have begun to step up to increase the ambition of their climate targets—including recent announcements on a UK target of 68% reductions by 2030, an EU target of 55% reductions by 2030, a Chinese commitment to peak emissions before 2030 and to reach carbon neutrality before 2060, and 2050 net-zero targets by Japan and Korea.

Developing an ambitious and credible NDC, of similar or higher ambition than other national targets, is therefore an essential national domestic process that is also critical for advancing international action. As the United States rejoins the Paris Agreement, it will need to update its NDC, including an emissions target for 2030<sup>6</sup> and a strategy for meeting that target, well in advance of the next climate meeting in November 2021. In this context, a broadly shared vision for rebuilding the U.S. economy offers new opportunities to lay the foundation for a net-zero emissions future through action in Congress, in non-federal levels of government, and across the private sector. The U.S. NDC planning process provides a focusing moment to integrate and even to expand ambition by non-federal leaders, even as the federal government presses forward on all fronts to drive additional action and to provide significant fiscal and institutional support to non-federal action across the country. Moreover, given that any new U.S. target will be viewed with a wary eye in light of the recent anti-climate stance of the previous Administration, an NDC supported by an all-in climate strategy can add credibility based on the strong record of recent non-federal actions and the potential for federal action that includes support for expanded non-federal action.

## THE SCALE AND IMPACT OF NON-FEDERAL ACTION TO SUPPORT NATIONAL ACTION

The last four years have witnessed an unprecedented increase in the scale and strength of U.S. climate action at the non-federal level.<sup>7</sup> As reported in recent America's Pledge analyses, the coalition of non-federal actors committed to deep emissions reductions has grown to represent approximately 65% of the population and nearly 70% of GDP.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, members of this coalition are adopting innovative, targeted policies and programs to achieve their goals at a pace few could have expected four years ago.

A total of 14 U.S. states now have statutory targets (enacted through legislation) to reduce emissions by 80% or more by 2050, while another 10 have adopted similar commitments through executive orders or resolutions. The number of U.S. cities committed to 100% clean electricity has now risen to over 170, electric utilities and large corporations are rapidly adopting emissions reduction goals, and novel regional frameworks that will be vital for comprehensive decarbonization—such as cap and invest for the transportation sector—are taking hold. The number of electric vehicles on the roads has doubled in the past four years. Sixteen states have committed to the HFC phase-down, including California, establishing a de-facto standard.<sup>9</sup> Through shared policy priorities and the transfer of technical expertise, effective policies and programs have expanded across jurisdictions, as illustrated by the increasing adoption of regulations to phase down emissions from HFCs, methane, and other pollutants at the state level.

While this momentum has been encouraging, the United States now faces a critical juncture as it moves to recover its credibility and once again demonstrate climate leadership on the global stage. Given the urgency of the task, such a process can leverage the existing ambition, potential, and experience of non-federal actors. Our analysis demonstrates that ambitious policies by non-federal actors in the areas of renewable energy, transportation, and non-CO<sub>2</sub> emissions mitigation—based on existing policy frameworks—can drive national emissions down by 37% by 2030 from 2005 levels, even without federal engagement.<sup>10</sup> With the federal government leveraging, reinforcing, and further scaling these actions, the United States can drive national emissions down by nearly 50% by 2030 from 2005 levels. Such a target would allow the United States to rise to the moment and deliver ambitious yet achievable reductions. Put simply, by integrating non-federal action into its climate strategy, the United States can submit a defensible NDC in-line with the needed trajectory.

The all-in strategy also provides a more durable approach to U.S. climate action by integrating it more fully across our federal system of governance. Strong federal engagement will be a critical element of achieving meaningful emission reductions. However, as we have witnessed in recent years, without a strong basis across the U.S. economy, federal actions are vulnerable to shifting political winds. Robust non-federal action builds a stronger, long-term basis for continued federal action that supports and leverages the many tools available to states, cities, businesses, and others. Such actors can also contribute to policy innovation and market development based on local conditions, creating synergies for climate mitigation and economic development.<sup>11</sup> Such synergies can create and reinforce greater shared responsibility across all levels of government and with the broader private and public sectors, leading to a race to the top that benefits all.

## DEVELOPING AN ALL-IN CLIMATE STRATEGY

Generating an ambitious all-in national climate strategy and delivering an associated NDC to the international community will be critical for the United States and the world to address the climate crisis.<sup>12,13</sup> Structuring such a strategy will require new approaches to link non-federal actors into national processes;<sup>14,15</sup> recover from the COVID and economic crises;<sup>16</sup> provide broadly shared benefits, and expand and support diverse and distributed climate actions across the country. It will also require new ways of understanding and communicating the impacts of these actions to the international community to encourage further action across the world. Integrating full federal action with enhanced non-federal action will require an unprecedented level of integration across different levels of government and actor groups. The White House should play a leading role by recognizing the opportunities for leveraging additional and significant actions from non-federal actors and structuring a process to meaningfully connect non-federal with national leadership. Such activities could take many forms, but opportunities include:

1. **Establish an All-In Climate Task Force.** The White House can lead a new task force on all-in climate action that includes leaders from both the federal government and from a diverse set of non-federal actors representing states, cities, businesses, and others. The task force could provide a forum for coordination and communications as the White House develops its all-in national climate strategy and NDC. The task force would meet regularly and serve as a locus for developing ideas, sharing progress, and receiving input on opportunities.
2. **Highlight and Celebrate Non-Federal Actions.** The White House can use its platform to feature and highlight leadership across the country and identify areas of both pioneering leadership and unity. This can include public statements, events, virtual or physical (when safe) roadshows featuring prominent climate team members, and awards.
3. **Establish Liaisons in Federal Agencies.** Designated liaisons to coordinate with the non-federal community can ensure that federal programs, regulatory actions, and strategies are broadly understood and implemented; that they draw from lessons learned in non-federal experience; and can ensure rapid feedback between the federal and non-federal actors.
4. **Provide Institutional Support for Non-Federal Action.** The federal government can expand diverse forms of support for non-federal action, including funding, technical assistance, capacity building, and legal support.
5. **Support Broader Action through Non-Governmental Discussions.** Non-federal coalitions can work with the Task Force to invite additional actions that could be incorporated into national strategy planning and NDC development.
6. **Integrate Non-Federal Action into the NDC Development.** Existing and new contributions from non-federal actors can be integrated into the analysis of an overall U.S. emissions strategy. The America's Pledge analysis<sup>17,18</sup> provides a template for how such actions can be incorporated into an NDC. Such analysis can be updated to include expected actions from the federal executive branch and Congress, and expanded actions from the non-federal community.
7. **Work with the International Community to Highlight the Centrality of Non-Federal Action.** While action at the U.S. federal level regressed over the past four years, non-federal leadership has advanced. From an international perspective, highlighting our non-federal action creates needed credibility: it bolsters the case that the United States has continued to advance climate action and has existing momentum to build on in delivering further action. Advancing these concepts in the international community, and encouraging other countries to engage with the non-federal community as appropriate in their own national contexts, creates significant opportunities for the United States to offer international leadership<sup>19</sup> and to catalyze broader ambition<sup>20</sup>. This can include engaging our own domestic non-federal community as a critical piece of an overall new diplomatic strategy and working with international partners to highlight non-federal action as part of the UN climate process at COP26.

Both the United States and the world are now well-positioned to increase climate ambition and action rapidly in the coming year and beyond. Actions from the new U.S. Administration will play a critical role in realizing this opportunity. Developing an ambitious national target for an NDC will be challenging. The pathways for strong legislation from Congress are still developing, and rapid, creative all-of-society approaches will both deliver immediate action and create more opportunities for advancing such legislation. In this light, even with a new Administration that has placed climate at the center of their actions, the path forward for the United States necessarily will involve leveraging maximum non-federal action to support higher national ambition, robustness, and implementation. America's Pledge has pointed the way toward a strategy that can deliver emissions reductions of almost 50% below 2005 levels by 2030 and set the country on a path toward 2050 net-zero emissions. Yet this goal would require a true "all-in" approach that goes far beyond the federal government—leveraging new, complementary, and reinforcing actions from the Executive Branch, Congress, and non-federal actors. While this has not been done deliberately and systematically before, our recent experiences in the United States point to a set of strategies that could succeed—and those strategies require a combination of formal and informal linkages between the diverse set of actors.

**Together, as the United States rebuilds its economy after the pandemic, we can build an "all-in" climate strategy that gets the United States on a high-ambition, credible, and a robust pathway toward net-zero emissions by 2050 and helps the world track toward our shared global goals.**

<sup>1</sup> Center for Global Sustainability, University of Maryland

<sup>2</sup> World Resources Institute

<sup>3</sup> Rocky Mountain Institute

<sup>4</sup> America's Pledge (2019). Accelerating America's Pledge: Going All-In to Build a Prosperous, Low-Carbon Economy for the United States. By Hultman, N., C. Frisch, L. Clarke, K. Kennedy, P. Bodnar, P. Hansel, T. Cyr, M. Manion, M. Edwards, J. Lund, C. Bowman, J. Jaeger, R. Cui, A. Clapper, A. Sen, D. Saha, M. Westphal, W. Jaglom, J.C. Altamirano, H. Hashimoto, M. Dennis, K. Hammoud, C. Henderson, G. Zwicker, M. Ryan, J. O'Neill, E. Goldfield New York: The America's Pledge Initiative on Climate Change and Bloomberg Philanthropies, with the University of Maryland Center for Global Sustainability, Rocky Mountain Institute, and World Resources Institute. 156 pp. consisting of 94 pp. Report, 62 pp. Technical Appendix. Available at: [www.americaspledge.com/reports](http://www.americaspledge.com/reports)

<sup>5</sup> Bianco, N., Litz, F., D. Saha, T. Clevenger, D. Lashof (2020). New Climate Federalism: Defining Federal, State, and Local Roles in a U.S. Policy Framework to Achieve Decarbonization. World Resources Institute Working Paper, 31 pp. Available at <https://files.wri.org/s3fs-public/new-climate-federalism-working-paper.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> An NDC could also include other dates, such as 2035.

<sup>7</sup> America's Pledge and We Are Still In (2020). We Are Still In to Deliver on America's Pledge: A Retrospective. Published by Bloomberg Philanthropies with Rocky Mountain Institute, University of Maryland Center for Global Sustainability, and World Resources Institute. Available at: [americaspledge.com/reports](http://americaspledge.com/reports)

<sup>8</sup> Accelerating America's Pledge (2019).

<sup>9</sup> Jaglom et al (2020) and We Are Still In to Deliver America's Pledge contain a number of other examples.

<sup>10</sup> Accelerating America's Pledge (2019).

<sup>11</sup> Bianco, N., Litz, F., D. Saha, T. Clevenger, D. Lashof (2020). New Climate Federalism: Defining Federal, State, and Local Roles in a U.S. Policy Framework to Achieve Decarbonization. World Resources Institute Working Paper, 31 pp. Available at <https://files.wri.org/s3fs-public/new-climate-federalism-working-paper.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Hultman, N., L. Clarke, C. Frisch, K. Kennedy, H. McJeon, T. Cyr, P. Hansel, P. Bodnar, M. Manion, M.R. Edwards, R. Cui, C. Bowman, J. Lund, M. Westphal, A. Clapper, J. Jaeger, A. Sen, J. Lou, D. Saha, W. Jaglom, K. Calhoun, K. Igusky, J. deWeese, K. Hammoud, J.C. Altamirano, M. Dennis, C. Henderson, G. Zwicker, J. O'Neill, "Fusing national and sub-national climate action is central to rapid near-term decarbonization: The case of the United States." Nature Communications 11, 5255. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-18903-w>

<sup>13</sup> N. Hultman (2020). "Building an ambitious and robust U.S. climate target: A comprehensive process to catalyze national and subnational climate action for the next NDC." The Brookings Institution & Center for Global Sustainability, University of Maryland. Brookings Global Economy & Development Working Paper 146, 30 pp. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/building-an-ambitious-and-robust-us-climate-target/>

<sup>14</sup> Hale, T.N., Chan, S., Hsu, A., Clapper, A., Elliott, C., Faria, P., Kuramochi, T., McDaniel, S., Morgado, M., Roelfsema, M., Santaella, M., Singh, N., Tout, I., Weber, C., Weinfurter, A., Widerberg, O., 2020. Sub- and non-state climate action: a framework to assess progress, implementation and impact. Climate Policy, DOI: 10.1080/14693062.2020.1828796

<sup>15</sup> Hsu, A., Brandt, J., Widerberg, O., Chan, S., Weinfurter, A., 2020. Exploring links between national climate strategies and non-state and subnational climate action in nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Climate Policy, 20:4, 443–457. DOI:10.1080/14693062.2019.1624252

<sup>16</sup> America's Pledge (2020). Delivering on America's Pledge: Achieving Climate Progress in 2020. By: W. Jaglom, C. Frisch, K. Kennedy, L. Clarke, N. Hultman, T. Cyr, J. Lund, D. Saha, J. Feldmann, C. Bowman, J. O'Neill, M. Campton, M. Herbert, L. Calle, A. Light, P. Bodnar The America's Pledge Initiative on Climate Change. Published by Bloomberg Philanthropies with Rocky Mountain Institute, University of Maryland Center for Global Sustainability, and World Resources Institute. 81 pp. Available at: [americaspledge.com/reports](http://americaspledge.com/reports)

<sup>17</sup> America's Pledge (2019). Accelerating America's Pledge: Going All-In to Build a Prosperous, Low-Carbon Economy for the United States. By Hultman, N., C. Frisch, L. Clarke, K. Kennedy, P. Bodnar, P. Hansel, T. Cyr, M. Manion, M. Edwards, J. Lund, C. Bowman, J. Jaeger, R. Cui, A. Clapper, A. Sen, D. Saha, M. Westphal, W. Jaglom, J.C. Altamirano, H. Hashimoto, M. Dennis, K. Hammoud, C. Henderson, G. Zwicker, M. Ryan, J. O'Neill, E. Goldfield New York: The America's Pledge Initiative on Climate Change and Bloomberg Philanthropies, with the University of Maryland Center for Global Sustainability, Rocky Mountain Institute, and World Resources Institute. 156 pp. consisting of 94 pp. Report, 62 pp. Technical Appendix. Available at: [www.americaspledge.com/reports](http://www.americaspledge.com/reports)

<sup>18</sup> America's Pledge (2018). Fulfilling America's Pledge: How States, Cities and Businesses are Leading the United States to a Low-Carbon Future. By Hultman, N., K. Calhoun, P. Bodnar, K. Kennedy, M. Manion, P. Hansel, T. Cyr, K. Igusky, C. Bowman, J. DeWeese, A. Sen, J. Lou, K. Chen, J.Y. Akopian, S. Russell, N. Keohane, D. Francis, D. Ribeiro, W. Berg, S. Smarripas, S. Vaidyanathan, P. Kiely, C. Jiang, M. Brownstein, M. Watson, J. Peress, D. Lyon, Mulligan, T. Clevenger, J. Thwaites, H. Hull, A. Benn, E. Franconi, E.J. Klock-McCook, M. Liebman, W. Krawczyk, J. Frech, F. Sanchez, A. Prada, A. Clapper, L. Cervantes Valdivieso, Z. Abdullah, I. van der Vlugt, J. Crowe, E. Waggoner, G. Stevens, M. Gordon, E. Messer, N. Veilleux, J. Koo. (2018). New York: The America's Pledge Initiative on Climate Change and Bloomberg Philanthropies, with the University of Maryland Center for Global Sustainability, Rocky Mountain Institute, World Resources Institute, Environmental Defense Fund, American Council on an Energy Efficient Economy, CDP, and the Cadmus Group. 256 pp. consisting of 168 pp. Report, 88 pp. Technical Appendix. Available at: [www.americaspledge.com/reports](http://www.americaspledge.com/reports)

<sup>19</sup> Podesta, J. and T. Stern (2020). A Foreign Policy for the Climate: How American Leadership Can Avert Catastrophe. Foreign Affairs. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-04-13/foreign-policy-climate>

<sup>20</sup> Hale, T. and N. Hultman (2020). 'All in' climate diplomacy: How a Biden-Harris administration can leverage city, state, business, and community climate action. Brookings Global Economy & Development Working Paper 147, 12 pp. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/all-in-climate-diplomacy-how-a-biden-harris-administration-can-leverage-city-state-business-and-community-climate-action/>