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Then-candidate President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign town hall at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center & Fairgrounds, Oct. 14, 2024, in Oaks, Pa., as moderator South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem listens. (AP/Alex Brandon, File)



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Two leading Catholic environmental groups denounced early actions by the Trump administration as threats to the "life and dignity of all people," urging the president to reverse his plans to expand fossil fuels, roll back regulations and exit the Paris climate accord.

In a joint statement Jan. 27, Catholic Climate Covenant and the North American chapter of the Laudato Si' Movement expressed "alarm at the extensive reversal of U.S. domestic and international climate policies by the Trump administration" at a time when scientists have warned that climate change, driven by burning fossil fuels, is causing devastation and suffering in the country and around the world.

"Rather than embrace and advance this country's essential role in domestic and global responsibilities to confront this existential [climate] crisis, this new administration has chosen to relinquish scientific and economic potential, freeze U.S. commitments, and abdicate leadership on climate policies," the Catholic organizations said.

Those moves, they said, will worsen climate change and most impact the poorest people in the U.S. and abroad, who stand to suffer disproportionately from more intense heat waves and droughts and more destructive wildfires, floods and storms.

> 'The executive orders ... not only call into question the administration's claims of caring for our country and its economic well-being — they threaten the rights to life and dignity of all people, which are key to Catholic Social Teaching.'
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In his first hours as president, Donald Trump issued a flurry of executive orders, including ones aimed at energy and the environment. Along with reversing many

environmental policies enacted by former President Joe Biden, Trump declared a national energy emergency as part of efforts to expand oil and gas drilling across the country, including in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

At the same time, he halted offshore wind projects, expedited environmental permitting for energy projects, paused clean energy funds under the Inflation Reduction Act and bipartisan infrastructure law, disbanded the presidential advisory council on science and technology, and ended environmental justice programs.

Legal challenges are expected for many of the energy executive actions.

Trump also directed the U.S. to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, repeating an action he took during his first administration. Under the climate accord's terms, withdrawal takes effect one year after it is formally submitted.

The moves came on the heels of 2024 being declared the hottest year on record, as wildfires raged across Southern California, and at a critical juncture for the planet's efforts to reduce emissions.

"Withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, cutting global adaptation funding, freezing Infrastructure and Inflation Reduction Act funds helping the most vulnerable, gutting environmental organizations and agencies, and working to stop U.S. progress on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and adaptation programs place our country outside of the family of nations confronting this crisis and increase the threat facing future generations," the Catholic environmental groups said.

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"The executive orders outlining these choices not only call into question the administration's claims of caring for our country and its economic well-being — they threaten the rights to life and dignity of all people, which are key to Catholic Social Teaching," they said.

Catholic Climate Covenant and Laudato Si' Movement called on the Trump administration to reverse its decisions, and for Congress to ensure the country's commitments on domestic and international climate programs and financing.

Catholic Climate Covenant, a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit, was launched in 2006 by the U.S. bishops and is supported by 20 national Catholic organizations. The Laudato Si' Movement is composed of roughly 900 Catholic organizations worldwide that are committed to responding to Pope Francis' calls for ecological and climate action in his 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home."

Once the U.S. officially exits the Paris Agreement, it will join Iran, Libya and Yemen as the only countries not part of it.

Adopted in 2015, the agreement stands as the major international channel for countries to address climate change. Under its terms, nearly 200 nations, including the Holy See, have committed to reduce heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit global warming to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius, and ideally 1.5 C (2.7 F).

Related: Catholic climate policy advocates express concern about some Trump proposals

Before leaving office, Biden — who reversed Trump's first withdrawal from the Paris accord — submitted a new national climate pledge to reduce U.S. emissions 61-66% from 2005 levels by 2035.

Scientists have concluded that global emissions must be reduced by nearly half by 2030 in order to keep the 1.5 C temperature limit goal a possibility.

The executive order withdrawing from the Paris Agreement said that such international agreements "steer American taxpayer dollars to countries that do not require, or merit, financial assistance in the interests of the American people."

In the executive order declaring a national emergency on energy, Trump said that current production and generating capacity "are all far too inadequate to meet our Nation's needs."

Before his return to the White House, the U.S. was already the world's leading user and producer of oil and gas. The country is also the largest historical source of greenhouse gas emissions and currently second in present-day emissions, behind only China.

In their statement, Catholic Climate Covenant and Laudato Si' Movement noted that Francis, in his apostolic exhortation "*Laudate Deum*," highlighted "the outsized

contributions of the U.S. to carbon emissions. The pope said in that document, "A broad change in the irresponsible lifestyle connected with the Western model would have a significant long-term impact."

The Catholic groups also quoted a 2019 document from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that said, "Climate change is one of the principal challenges facing society and the global community," with its impacts "borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world."

Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, echoed that sentiment in a Jan. 22 statement on Trump's executive orders, saying that the president's actions around the environment, alongside immigration, the death penalty and foreign aid were "deeply troubling and will have negative consequences, many of which will harm the most vulnerable among us."

Read this next: Climate clashes with Trump could await as Cardinal McElroy heads to DC
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