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Summary of the President-Elect Biden Climate and Clean Energy Plans

As part of his campaign, President-elect Biden released two plans relating to climate and clean energy: the Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice (“the Climate Plan”)¹ and the Plan to Build a Modern, Sustainable Infrastructure and an Equitable Clean Energy Future (“the Clean Energy Plan”).² In addition, the President-elect highlighted climate change as one of four priorities of the Biden-Harris transition (Climate Transition Plan).³

The Climate Plan states that “climate change poses an existential threat – not just to our environment, but to our health, our communities, our national security, and our economic well-being.” It places two “basic truths” at the core of the plan: “(1) the U.S. urgently needs to embrace greater ambition on an epic scale to meet the scope of this challenge, and (2) our environment and our economy are completely and totally connected.” The Clean Energy Plan states that “getting to a 100% clean energy economy is not only an obligation, it’s an opportunity” and calls for a \$2 trillion accelerated investment with details on how to deploy those resources in the first term, “setting us on an irreversible course to meet the ambitious climate progress that science demands.” The Climate Transition Plan has dual goals of “creat[ing] union jobs by tackling the climate crisis.”

As detailed more below, for the power sector, the three plans call for:

- a carbon-free power sector by 2035;
- legislation to achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050;
- deep electrification to achieve emissions reductions, including transportation (both on-road and rail), buildings, and certain industrial processes;
- federal energy and climate investment of \$1.7 trillion over ten years, including research on, among other things, storage, advanced nuclear, hydrogen, and carbon capture, use, and storage (CCUS); and
- an equitable workforce transition, including for communities surrounding retiring power plants.

The Climate Transition Plan highlights job creation and resilience, placing near-term climate action in the context of the current economy and COVID-19 crisis. It calls for “launch [of] a national effort aimed at creating the jobs we need to build modern, sustainable infrastructure now and deliver an equitable clean energy future.”

Below is a brief summary of the Biden Climate, Clean Energy, and Climate Transition Plans.

100% Clean Energy Economy and Net-Zero Emissions by 2050

The Climate Plan commits to immediately using “the full authority of the executive branch” to put in action a plan to achieve a 100% clean energy economy by 2050. This includes, among other things:

¹ <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>

² <https://joebiden.com/clean-energy/>

³ <https://buildbackbetter.com/priorities/climate-change/>

- Requiring aggressive methane pollution limits for new and existing oil and gas operations;
- Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation by implementing the Clean Air Act and developing fuel economy standards aimed to ensure 100% of new sales for light- and medium-duty vehicles are electrified and annual improvements for heavy-duty vehicles;
- Requiring public companies to disclose climate risks and the GHG emissions in their operations and supply chains; and
- Banning oil and gas permitting on public lands and waters.

Many of these actions would be reinstating Obama-era regulations; however, some, such as the fuel economy standards, would be more stringent than previous standards. Additionally, both campaign plans recognize that reaching these targets will require Congressional action.

The Clean Energy plan calls for a carbon-free electricity sector by 2035. To support a clean energy economy, the Clean Energy Plan notes the need “to build the next generation of electric grid transmission and distribution,” and to do this, “Biden will prioritize re-powering of lines that already exist with new technology.” The Plan also notes he would “cut red-tape to promote faster and easier permitting.”

Economy-wide, the Climate Plan calls for Congress to establish an enforcement mechanism to achieve economy-wide net-zero emissions no later than 2050, including an interim target no later than the end of Biden’s first term in 2025. For the power sector, the Clean Energy Plan calls for reforming and extending tax incentives as well as enacting a technology-neutral Energy Efficiency and Clean Electricity Standard (EECES) for utilities and grid operators that achieves carbon-free electricity generation by 2035.

While the Climate Transition Plan does not specifically call for a Clean Energy Standard, it reiterates the need to “put the United States on an irreversible path to achieve net-zero emissions, economy-wide, by no later than 2050.” In addition, it calls for a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035. The plan also anticipates an innovation and commercialization program for “critical clean energy technologies,” including battery storage, negative emissions technologies, the next generation of building materials, renewable hydrogen, and advanced nuclear.

The Climate Plan calls for a federal investment of \$1.7 trillion over the next ten years, leveraging additional private sector and state and local investments to total more than \$5 trillion. The federal investment will be paid for by reversing corporate tax cuts and other tax breaks, including ending subsidies for fossil fuels. Both campaign plans call for investment in energy and climate research totaling \$400 billion over ten years, in programs such as:

- Establishing a new “ARPA-C” focused on climate research, including, for example: storage; advanced nuclear, as well as cost, safety, and waste disposal issues associated with nuclear power; zero net energy buildings; using renewables to produce hydrogen that is cost competitive to shale gas; carbon-free industrial heat; and CCUS;
- Deploying 500,000 new public electric vehicle chargers by 2030 and transforming public transit funding;
- Accelerating the development of energy efficiency standards; and
- Enacting a national strategy to develop a low-carbon manufacturing sector in every state.

Resilience and Infrastructure Investment

In the Climate Plan, Biden commits that “every infrastructure investment that receives federal funding should reduce climate pollution, as much as possible.” As part of a “Clean Energy Revolution” legislative package, the Plan calls for investments in clean and resilient infrastructure and communities. The Plan notes that this will

require partnering with other stakeholders, such as working with the insurance industry to lower property insurance premiums and bringing together innovators and communities to improve zoning and buildings codes. Under both campaign plans, Biden also proposes to expand investment in passenger and freight rail, focus on clean water infrastructure, improve public transit, and create a new class of well-paying jobs and job training around climate-resilient industries.

Additionally, the Clean Energy Plan and Climate Transition Plans call for upgrading four million buildings and weatherizing two million homes over four years through mobilizing the U.S. workforce and providing cash rebates and low-cost financing for households. The Clean Energy Plan also calls for legislation that would set a net-zero emission standard for all new commercial buildings by 2030 with the target of reducing by half buildings' carbon footprint by 2035. The Clean Energy Plan also focuses on upgrading schools and public housing.

The Climate Transition Plan also calls for a broad infrastructure program that would invest in roads and bridges, broadband, electricity, and water.

Workforce Development

The plans make clear that the Administration would focus on all workers impacted by the energy transition, including coal miners, power plant workers and their communities, and the auto industry. The Clean Energy Plan notes that “transforming the U.S. electricity sector – and electrifying an increasing share of the economy – represents the biggest job creation and economic opportunity engine of the 21st century.” Under the Climate Plan, Biden proposes to secure the benefits coal miners and their families have earned; invest in coal and power plant communities and other communities impacted by the climate transformation; and establish a Task Force on Coal and Power Plant Communities modeled on the Task Force for Detroit when the auto industry was in turmoil.

Additionally, the Clean Energy Plan includes a goal to create one million new jobs in auto manufacturing, auto supply chains, and auto infrastructure. The Plan includes myriad proposals for executive action including purchasing power, R&D, tax, trade, and investment policies, with the goal of situating the U.S. as the global leader in the manufacture of electric vehicles and their input materials and parts. The Clean Energy Plan also proposes to create more than a quarter million jobs immediately to clean up local economies from the impacts of resource extraction.

Each component of the Climate Transition Plan calls for the creation of new jobs, often with an opportunity to join a union. Sectors highlighted include power, agriculture, transit, and auto manufacturing.

Addressing Disproportionate Harm to Communities of Color and Low-Income Communities

The Climate Plan would recognize the disproportionate harm of climate change and environmental burdens felt by people of color, tribal communities, and low-income populations. Biden would reinstate federal protections, rolled back by the Trump Administration, that were designed to protect communities. He would also direct EPA and the Department of Justice to pursue criminal anti-pollution cases to the fullest extent permitted by law and, when needed, seek additional legislation as needed to “hold corporate executives personally accountable.” Additionally, he would make water infrastructure a top priority and ensure that communities harmed by climate change and pollution receive preference in competitive grant programs in the “Clean Economy Revolution.”

The Clean Energy Plan would set a goal of ensuring that 40 percent of the benefits of the clean energy, energy efficiency, clean transit, housing, workforce, remediation, and clean water investments be directed to disadvantaged communities. Biden would also create a Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool to identify disadvantaged communities and prioritize strategies that reduce traditional air pollution for those communities.

The Climate Transition Plan states that environmental justice must be a key consideration in “where, how, and with whom we build,” and that creating “good, union, middle-class jobs in communities left behind” must be a focus of climate action.

International Climate Leadership

The Climate Plan and Climate Transition Plans would have the U.S. re-enter the Paris Agreement on day one of the Biden Administration. The Climate Plan outlines a major diplomatic push to raise the ambitions of countries’ climate targets. Within the first 100 days, Biden would:

- Convene a climate world summit;
- Establish enforceable international agreements to reduce emissions in global shipping and aviation; and
- Embrace the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol for hydrofluorocarbons.

Biden would also:

- Commit to imposing carbon adjustment fees or quotas on carbon-intensive goods from countries that are failing to meet their climate and environmental obligations;
- Provide “green debt relief” for developing countries that make climate commitments;
- Condition future trade agreements on commitments to meet enhanced Paris climate targets; and
- Demand a worldwide ban on fossil fuel subsidies.

A focus of the Climate Plan is holding China and “global climate outlaws” to a high climate standard in partnership with other global allies. Actions would include:

- Making future bilateral U.S.-China agreements on carbon mitigation contingent on China’s elimination of export subsidies for coal and other high-emissions technologies and ensuring emission reductions of infrastructure projects;
- Instituting a new Global Climate Change Report to hold countries accountable for meeting, or failing to meet, their Paris commitments; and
- Strengthening collaboration and ambition in the Americas through a focus on land use, forests, agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and tourism.

Additionally, the Climate Plan commits to make climate change a core national security priority, requesting a series of reports on the impacts and risks of climate change on defense and security, and investing in the climate resilience of military bases and critical security infrastructure.

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