

The “Paris Gap,” and How to Fix It

The Paris Agreement on climate change is a world-shattering event, a rare coming together of the international community to face a shared threat. President Obama deserves a lot of credit for the success of the two-week conclave, because of his earlier diplomacy with China and executive actions to reduce emissions, and Secretary of State John Kerry also deserves kudos for staying on site in Paris to see the agreement to its conclusion. Praise also belongs to the conference organizers, staff, and leaders, not to mention the hundreds of delegates.

But the sad fact is that even if all nations meet their international obligations as pledged, the planet is on a trajectory where the increase in temperature over pre-industrial levels could total 3.5 degrees Celsius — a whopping 6 degrees Fahrenheit, an amount that is inconceivable and which would threaten civilization. The Paris Agreement, meanwhile, has a goal of 2°C, and an aspirational target of 1.5°C. Those goals stand at the limit scientists have placed after which catastrophic conditions will obtain for much of the world.

When it comes to gaps between the aspirational and the realistic,

nobody knows the score better than Michael P. Vandenberg of Vanderbilt Law School, a former partner in the Latham & Watkins law firm. He’s been writing about the “behavioral wedge” representing the space on a graph between what households do to reduce their carbon footprint and what they could do with proper public policy spurs or private initiatives.

In a recent law review article co-authored with Jonathan M. Gilligan titled “Beyond Gridlock,” the writers identify a similar gap between what is necessary to fight off the worst effects of climate change and what current governmental policy would achieve given the policy paralysis that has gripped Washington for the last several years.

The authors call for a raft of private initiatives which together would supply as much as a quarter of the emissions reductions necessary to buy the world a decade in which it can deploy much larger governmental initiatives needed to close the gap. The authors thus call the use of private governance aimed at climate change a “second best” method, behind much more comprehensive governmental actions such as a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade system.

When I emailed Vandenberg after the Paris talks closed, he named a “Paris Gap,” between the aspirational and the

As of this October, the Earth had warmed by about 1.7 degrees Fahrenheit since 1880, when tracking began at a global scale. The number may sound low, but as an average over the surface of an entire planet, it is actually high. . . . The heat accumulating in the Earth because of human emissions is roughly equal to the heat that would be released by 400,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs exploding across the planet every day.

— *New York Times*, in a briefing on climate change

likely, and reiterated the need for private initiatives. “In my view, the Paris Agreement was a success because it found a common ground among roughly 195 countries, including the major developing countries,” he said. “The agreement sends important signals in the marketplace that a low-carbon economy is in the future, but it also sends an unintended market signal: It clarifies the extent of the emissions reductions that are likely to occur for the next decade, and those are inadequate.”

The Paris Agreement “not only represents reason for hope that the international process will yield genu-

Sorry, George Will, There Has Been No Warming Hiatus

The rate of global warming during the last 15 years has been as fast as or faster than that seen during the latter half of the 20th century. [Our] study refutes the notion that there has been a slowdown or “hiatus” in the rate of global warming in recent years.

The study is the work of a team of scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Centers for Environmental Information using the latest global surface temperature data.

“Adding in the last two years of global

surface temperature data and other improvements in the quality of the observed record provide evidence that contradicts the notion of a hiatus in recent global warming trends,” said Thomas R. Karl, director, NOAA’s National Centers for Environmental Information. “Our new

analysis suggests that the apparent hiatus may have been largely the result of limitations in past datasets, and that the rate of warming over the first 15 years of this century has, in fact, been as fast or faster than that seen over the last half of the 20th century.”

— *NOAA website*

ine emissions reductions, but it also makes it clear that the international process will not produce the reductions over the next decade that are necessary to achieve the goals or aspirations articulated in that agreement,” he said. “It is time to ramp up efforts to identify gap-filling initiatives if we want to reduce the risks of catastrophic climate change.”

As an example, the authors wrote in the law review article, “inefficient energy use provides an opportunity for private initiatives to target actions that do not require altruistic motivations. Instead, these initiatives can target actions for which market failures or behavioral obstacles are blocking self-interested actions, and when self-interest aligns with energy efficiency or conservation, behavioral plasticity can be high even without government intervention.” As a rather vivid example, one food firm saved 9,200 tons of carbon just by changing the way it bought potatoes. Vandenberg and Gilligan identify a myriad of success stories and possibilities for further carbon reductions that can fill the wedge-shaped emissions gap.

In the email, Vandenberg added, “These initiatives include investor and lender pressure on corporations, NGO-corporate supply chain efforts, internal corporate carbon goals and carbon prices, and NGO-driven initiatives to bypass utilities to reduce household energy use.”

But the situation is getting desperate, and the Paris cutbacks won’t begin for five years, a delay that will be costly for the ecosystem. “It is time to increase the focus on how much private governance can contribute on its own, not just as a means of pushing governments,” Vandenberg said in the email.

Solving the problem of climate change will require an “all in” philosophy. Not only do we need strong governmental action, but we need an array of private initiatives too. Neither alone is enough.

NOTICE & COMMENT is written by the editor and represents his opinions.

NEWS THAT’S REUSED

You’re Fired! “A New York state senator said . . . that he will introduce legislation to strip Donald J. Trump State Park of its name, declaring that Trump’s recent rhetoric doesn’t line up with the values of New York state,” according to *Buzzfeed* in an online news item published in mid December.

The politician is Daniel Squadron, whose district encompasses parts of Brooklyn and lower Manhattan. The outspoken protector of public morals went on to say that “bigotry has no place in presidential politics and certainly shouldn’t be honored with a state park naming.”

Buzzfeed noted that “the park, an undeveloped stretch of 436 acres of land in Putnam and Westchester Counties, was donated by Trump to New York state in 2006 after plans to build a golf course fell through because of ‘strict environmental restrictions and permitting requirements,’ according to a *New York Times* report. Trump ultimately got a tax credit for the donation.”

The park was closed in 2010 and The Donald asked for the return of the land, threatening a lawsuit.

More Pot News: “Recreational marijuana is now legal in four states and the District of Columbia, and while some feared addiction or the smell, a new consequence is coming to light: It uses too much power,” according to *Energywire*, part of the *E&E News* service.

The weed first came under environmental scrutiny in California, as reported last year in NEWS THAT’S REUSED. In the Golden State, growing pot is a prime agricultural enterprise but with unregulated impacts because of its quasi-legal nature. Pot is legal for medical reasons but not for public consumption, as in a handful of states.

In Oregon, utility companies have

stepped into the breach. Many are “encouraging people to call in before they start a grow-op to have it checked out. Tom Gauntt, Pacific Power’s spokesman, said it’s to avoid overloading local systems and causing power outages.”

According to a local grower, Jesse Peters, electrical transformers were getting “cooked” — their term — by over use. “‘We want to get the right permits, use contractors and pay our taxes,’ he said. ‘We are the only industry asking for more regulation.’”

Citing CITES? “A stuffed toy tiger tied to the top of a vehicle generated a stir and a 911 call,” according to *The Columbian*. The newspaper quoted Connor Zuvich of Vancouver, the driver of the SUV in question. Showing that Northwest citizens are committed environmentlists, someone called in what looked like an endangered species violation. Keeping such animals is illegal in Washington state.

Blueway Blues: “Amid a public backlash, several conservation groups and state agencies no longer want the White River to be part of a new federal program that recognizes conservation and recreation efforts along waterways,” as reported in the *New York Times*.

Apparently, the route was part of a National Blueway designation for the river, which for its 700-mile length runs through Missouri and Arkansas.

“Groups on both sides of the issue agree that it’s the right thing to do,” the *Times* reports. “Opponents say the designation, given in January [2015], could lead to new regulations or land seizures, while one-time backers say the controversy could make landowners resistant to voluntarily cooperating with conservation efforts.”