The Trump administration’s decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Accord has galvanized climate action at the state and local level. A group of 12 states have formed a coalition, called the United States Climate Alliance, to meet Paris climate commitments and fill the void left by the U.S. government.

The Paris Accord is a historic global agreement reached by 195 countries in 2015 to set targets for reducing greenhouse gas, or GHG, emissions and limiting the rise in average global temperatures. The deal relies on voluntary cuts in emissions by all member nations. Under the agreement, the United States had pledged to cut its GHG emissions 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025 and commit up to $3 billion in aid for developing countries by 2020.

The United States Climate Alliance was launched by three Democratic governors—Jerry Brown of California, Andrew Cuomo of New York, and Jay Inslee of Washington—on June 1, 2017, the same day President Donald Trump announced his decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement.

As part of the alliance, the three Democratic governors have pledged to reduce their GHG emissions between a quarter and third by 2025 and to uphold the goals of former President Barack Obama’s Clean Power Plan, or CPP, which aimed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Earlier in March, Trump signed an executive order calling on the Environmental Protection Agency to reconsider the CPP.

Since then, nine others states have joined the alliance including Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia. Puerto Rico is also a member of the alliance. These member states collectively represent a third of the U.S. population and 36 percent of the U.S. overall Gross Domestic Product (as of 2016), and emitted 18 percent of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions in 2014. One member state, Hawaii, has also passed legislation formally committing to the Paris agreement. Hawaii’s legislation also creates a commission to explore measures to combat climate change and develop plans to address the impact of rising sea levels. In addition, Rhode Island’s Gov. Gina Raimondo signed an executive order reaffirming the state’s commitment to meeting the goals of the Paris Accord.

Ten other states—Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania—and the District of Columbia have also pledged to uphold the terms of the Paris Accord but not formally joined the alliance.
While U.S. states cannot join the Paris agreement as an official entity, the United Nations provides an avenue—via the United Nation’s Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action portal—for sub-national governments and companies to declare their climate pledges and participate in the agreement in many of the same ways that nations do. Over 12,500 pledges have already been submitted this way.

The alliance will provide a forum to sustain and strengthen existing climate programs, promote the sharing of information and best practices, and implement new programs to reduce carbon emissions from all sectors of the economy. In this manner, the new coalition will serve as a way for states interested in addressing the impacts of climate change to coordinate and work together.

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