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Leadership of the many

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L. Rafael Reif, President

To the members of the MIT community,

Yesterday, the White House took the position that the Paris climate agreement – a landmark effort to combat global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions – was a bad deal for America. Other nations have made clear that the deal is not open to renegotiation. And unfortunately, there is no negotiating with the scientific facts.

I believe all of us have a responsibility to stand up for concerted global action to combat and adapt to climate change.

At MIT, we take great care to get the science right. The scientific consensus is overwhelming: As human activity emits more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the global average surface temperature will continue to rise, driving rising sea levels and extreme weather.

Global warming is not a distant problem – not distant in time or space. Communities across the United States and around the world are already experiencing the impacts. Without immediate and concerted action, the damaging consequences will grow worse. As the Pentagon describes it, climate change is a “threat multiplier,” because its direct effects intensify other challenges, including mass migrations and zero-sum conflicts over existential resources like water and food. In short, global warming and its consequences present risks too grave to gamble with.

A global problem demands a global solution. With the Paris agreement, for the first time in history, 190+ nations agreed to work together to do something about it. In signing it, the U.S. was acting in concert with other nations, with the U.S. setting its own level of carbon reductions. The truth is that unless every nation joins in the solution, every nation will join in the suffering.

To solve this global problem, we must transform the global energy status quo. The Paris agreement is an important beginning: a mechanism that drives progress on emissions right away and speeds up progress over time. (Incidentally, MIT announced its own greenhouse gas reduction goal in October 2015, a month before the Paris conference, with our [Plan for Action on Climate Change](#), which commits us to reducing our campus emissions at least 32% by 2030.) With this running start, humanity has time to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. But the longer we hesitate, the lower the odds of success; the carbon dioxide our cars and power plants emit today will linger in the

atmosphere for a thousand years.

Climate change arguably represents the greatest threat of this generation. Fortunately, it also represents a tremendous opportunity. Already, hundreds of thousands of Americans work in the clean energy sector, and growth in clean energy jobs is rising fast: In 2016 alone, solar industry employment grew by 25 percent, while wind jobs grew 32 percent. As a nation, if we choose to invest in the relevant research, we have the opportunity to continue to lead, developing new energy technologies that will generate high-value exports and high-quality American jobs – the jobs of the future. That is in no way to minimize the disruption that the changing energy economy will cause to some workers and regions. But the solution to that problem is not to deny scientific facts and give away economic opportunity. If we don't seize this chance, other nations certainly will. By withdrawing from the Paris accord, the US is surrendering leadership in a priceless global market.

I am encouraged, however, to see so much leadership at the state and city level, in industry and at universities – here in Massachusetts and nationwide.

Time and again, this country has risen to civilizational challenges with a sense of optimism, creativity and drive. I hope that the people of the United States will – as a matter of service to the nation and the world – continue to take the lead in pursuing a carbon-free future.

In this work, the people of MIT have a special role to play. I look forward to working with you as we step up to the challenge.

Sincerely,

L. Rafael Reif

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