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Exploratory Draft

Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York, recently published an op-ed in the New York times where he made an interesting claim on the process of climate change and “How terrible it would be if a misunderstanding of American climate leadership — which is not based in Washington and never has been — led to an unraveling of the Paris agreement” (Bloomberg). Ever since the election of President Trump and his conservative views on climate change, including rolling back the Clean Power Plan put into place by President Obama, there has been talk of America no longer being able to lead the world in combatting climate change. But Bloomberg’s position here is to remind people that the government is not the sole factor influencing a change to clean fuels and away from high carbon emissions, but the market has power to drive the slowing of climate change as well. This firm opinion is a positive thought, and gives hope for those who are concerned with Trump’s seeming indifference towards this large topic in our country today. However, it raises an interesting question that must be dealt with: Is this enough? Can the pure economics of green innovation and the capitalist nature of businesses in America lead the change on climate change? Or is federal action required in order for America to remain at the forefront of climate change in the world today and keep its side of the Paris Agreement?

Research into the inclusion of green innovation in various businesses on the surface level seems to agree with Bloomberg’s claims. His finding that “wind power could displace up to two-thirds of coal-fired power production in 15 Midwestern states” (Moody’s) is very optimistic, and similar results can be found in other areas of the country and the world. Looking outside the borders of the United States, a report done on twelve Canada and Italy based manufacturing companies puts some meaning behind why this trend is occurring, besides the decreasing costs of green energy. It reads that currently “Marketers are facing increasing challenges to address sustainability issues in order to attract, satisfy, and retain customers” (473). The movement by so many people to support climate change has created motivation for companies to follow suit in order to gain their business. This process has nothing to do with the federal government, it is, as Bloomberg puts it, “Economics 101” (Bloomberg). This poses an interesting dilemma because if you are paying attention to the news it seems like Trump’s presidency is the end of the road for American efforts against climate change.

Reading about these claims from various sources led me to the next logical research question: How effective has the government been in its efforts against climate change? According to an article published by the New York Times in February of 2017, the answer is not so much. It reads that “During his eight years in office, President Obama regularly warned of the very real dangers of global warming, but he did not sign any meaningful domestic legislation to address the problem, largely because he and Congress did not see eye to eye” (“A Conservative Case for Climate Action”). Even under a President who made his commitment to slowing climate change clear, support for legislation was still not found and thus the government could not capitalize its effect on the climate. This points back to Bloomberg’s point that the most effective way for green innovation to take over and become the number one source of energy was for it to become the most economically viable option in order to draw investments and use from more and more businesses and families.

Even though it may be that we have a moral obligation to protect the climate that we live in, it may be time to face the dark truth that deep divisions in government may be too difficult to repair in the near future. At the beginning of the essay I posed the question if trusting the market to drive efforts against climate change would take too long, or if the government would need to hurry the process in order to create meaningful change in time. This question has now flipped, and it has become clear that the federal government is the one who is taking too long to act against climate change. It is imperative that the economy takes a role in making green innovation a more viable and usable option, like Bloomberg stated in his piece. Some may view acting against climate change as a moral and ethical issue, but it needs to be made into an economic issue. Lowering the price of green innovation will make actions against climate change into a business decision, where people are much more united than in their moral decisions.

Works Cited

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