

Commentary: Was the climate change conference in Glasgow a success?

It accomplished a lot, though the national goals don't cut emissions enough to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

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Special to the Telegram
3 Comments 14 Nov.

We have been in Glasgow, Scotland, these past two weeks for the absolutely crucial U.N. Climate Change Conference, COP26.

As we reflect on the question "Was COP26 a success?" we submit that, though the conference did not accomplish everything it needed to, it did accomplish a great deal. Its successes must now be implemented with greater ambition in Maine and around the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rev. Richard Killmer, a retired Presbyterian minister, is a resident of East Grand Rapids, Mich., and Yarmouth, and **Nate Rauh-Bieri** is a resident of Grand Rapids. Both attended COP26 in Glasgow as official observers and are active in the [Grand Rapids Climate Coalition](#).

Ultimately, the success of the conference will depend on what happens when the delegates go home; whether national, state and local governments address climate change with the vigor and speed science shows is necessary.

As of press time Friday – before a final agreement is reached – here are some of its accomplishments:

- This summit secured new agreements to end deforestation. The leaders of more than 100 countries pledged to end deforestation by 2030 in a sweeping accord aimed at protecting 85 percent of the world's forests, which absorb carbon dioxide and slow global temperature rise.
- In addition, 105 countries signed the Global Methane Pledge, including half of the world's top 30 methane-emitting countries.

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- President Biden pledged the United States to partner with vulnerable countries devastated by climate change. To that end, he promised to quadruple the amount of funding for developing countries to help them respond to the climate crisis. It must be noted, however, that to date, the U.S. has not upheld its promises on this front.

- China and the U.S. pledged to do more to cut emissions this decade and China committed for the first time to address emissions from methane. The declaration highlights the vital importance of closing the significant gap between current efforts and those needed to achieve the goals of the Paris agreement as soon as possible and outlines cooperative efforts the two countries will undertake to increase climate ambition during this decisive decade.
- On the transportation front, six automobile companies reminded the world that they agreed to phase out gas-powered cars by 2035. The future increasingly appears to be electric vehicles, electric public transportation and walking-and-biking-friendly communities.
- Over 40 countries pledged to phase out coal, the dirtiest of fossil fuels. The new pact includes 23 countries that have now promised to stop building and issuing permits for new coal plants at home and eventually shift away from using the fuel altogether. Among them are five of the world's top 20 power-generating countries: Poland, Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam and Ukraine. As of Friday, the overall COP26 draft agreement also includes a call for coal and fossil fuel phaseout. While we would like to see more concrete timelines for phaseouts, these pledges send significant signals.

All this said, some of COP26's critical goals were not met; these must yet be realized on the national and subnational levels. Though many nations want to phase out the use of coal, several of the biggest coal consumers were notably absent from the accord, including China and India. These countries combine to burn roughly two-thirds of the world's coal, along with Australia, the world's 11th biggest user of coal and a major exporter. The United States, which still generates about one-fifth of its electricity from coal, also did not sign.

The greatest shortcoming of COP26 is that the national goals (called Nationally Determined Contributions) of all 196 nations, when combined, do not reduce greenhouse-gas emissions enough to keep the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius – a target set forth by the Paris agreement and that science shows is necessary to avoid catastrophic climate impacts and loss of life.

So was COP26 a success? In critical respects, no; in others, yes. But now its successes must be implemented and improved upon in Maine and throughout the nation. As citizens living through the climate crisis, each of us can urge communities in Maine to take ambitious action to limit warming to 1.5 degrees – which will require the world to halve emissions by 2030 and virtually eliminate them by 2050. We can say that COP26 delivered success only if the federal government and our communities in Maine to move with speed and vigor. It's now up to us.