



# A Clean Energy Action Plan for the United States

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# Introduction and summary

After years of concerted effort to advance climate and clean energy policies, the United States has started on the path to a low-carbon economy. Several developments have fundamentally shifted the nation's energy outlook: falling technology costs; forward-leaning policies enacted by federal, state, local, and tribal governments; investments in new infrastructure; advances in energy efficiency and renewable energy research and development; and a newly minted international agreement to tackle climate change. The projected trajectory of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions has flattened, demonstrating to the United States and the world that pollution can be cut in the context of economic growth. To achieve a low-carbon economy, however, the United States must stay on this pathway for decades to come, something that can be assured only through continued effort.

The next president and Congress must build on this foundational set of policies and capitalize on the available suite of clean energy technologies. Investments made in energy infrastructure today will have carbon consequences tomorrow. If care is not taken to foster low-carbon options, support them financially, and remove barriers to their deployment, future policymakers might have even bigger challenges than they do now. These considerations call for a policymaking strategy that continues to advance the United States on the path toward deep emissions reductions by midcentury. The political and business case for deploying energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies has gained traction across the country.<sup>1</sup>

This report proposes policy recommendations that promote the three elements of decarbonization—energy efficiency, low-carbon electricity generation, and the electrification of end uses—and that address their integration, financing, and implementation at the federal level.<sup>2</sup> It examines specific policy actions that a new administration and Congress can take in the short term to expedite deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies. This is just one part of an overall climate mitigation strategy U.S. leaders will need to employ to meet the nation's long-term carbon pollution reduction targets.

By instituting these recommendations, the next president and Congress will accelerate the transformation of the electric power sector into the low-carbon engine of the U.S. economy. Because the deployment and integration of energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies in electricity generation and end uses create the foundation for further carbon emissions reductions in other sectors, the electric power sector is a crucial area in which policymaking can guide current momentum forward.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the risks posed by inaction on climate change have never been clearer, and the momentum to act has never been greater. These factors provide the next president and Congress with advantages no previous U.S. government has had: a clear need to act, bolstered by international agreement and demonstrated tools for successful action. But the next president and Congress will also face unprecedented pressures. With a proven scientific need for more ambitious pollution reductions, strengthening but still emerging clean energy supply chains, and greater domestic action necessary to lead the international community, U.S. policy leaders will need to act quickly and decisively. The next president and Congress should consider the recommendations in this report to champion a Clean Energy Action Plan that utilizes federal authorities and funding while encouraging states to act constructively and ambitiously. By moving forward with such a plan, the next president and Congress can transform current clean energy trends into realized pathways toward a low-carbon economy in the United States.

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