

How Trump can beat China without a trade war: Make America a renewable energy superpower



Utility-scale solar installation in a field.(Photo: SunPower)

If I were President Trump's trusted adviser, this is what I would tell him.

You can make America great again and beat China. It's up to you. China is well on its way to becoming the renewable energy superpower of the future. We can still come from behind and take the lead — if you make it a national priority.

Since the 2015 Paris Accord, the whole world has been moving as quickly as possible toward a clean energy future. Last year a record capacity of renewable power was added worldwide, far outstripping new fossil fuel generating capacity, according to *Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment 2018*. China led by investing \$126 billion in renewables — a 31% increase over 2016 and an impressive 45% of total global spending on renewable energy. That's more than triple the total U.S. investment in renewables, which declined 6% from 2016 to

2017.

China has a winning strategic plan. “Beijing hopes to make itself an energy exporter to rival the United States” says Amy Myers Jaffe, Director of the Council on Foreign Relations program on Energy Security and Climate Change. The push not only gives other countries the chance to cut their reliance on foreign oil and gas, she says, it also allows China to cut its own carbon emissions and move toward its goal of replacing the U.S. “as the most important player in many regional alliances and trading relationships.”

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We don't have to lose to China. Why not catch up and take the lead? When America lagged the Soviet Union in the space race, President Kennedy vowed, “We do not intend to stay behind, and in this decade, we shall make up and move ahead.” American astronauts were the first men to walk the moon less than 10 years later.

President Trump, you can follow in Kennedy's footsteps if you insist on urgent public investment in clean energy and efficiency. What might we accomplish if you boldly call on all Americans to win the energy race?

To win, you must be strategic in your policies. In February you placed a 30% tariff on solar panels imported from abroad with the intention of helping American solar manufacturers who cannot compete with cheaper imports. The problem is that only 37,000 Americans manufacture solar panels while more than 260,000 work on solar projects. By increasing the cost of solar panels, your tariff will cause the loss of 23,000 solar jobs over the next year, according to Solar Energy Industries Association estimates.

“In a state like Indiana, our jobs in solar are overwhelmingly in the installation arena,” said Jesse Kharbanda, executive director of the Hoosier Environmental Council. He said the policy is “hurting the very people that the Trump administration had pledged to help.”

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Why not spur American innovation in solar manufacturing with investment instead of a tit-for-tat on tariffs that costs American jobs? If the government builds solar installations across the country, and promises to buy American, you will create jobs that cannot be outsourced. Meanwhile you can count on American ingenuity to achieve technological breakthroughs for manufacturing a product the whole world wants to buy.

President Trump, your recent weakening of fuel efficiency standards for American cars and light trucks will not make America great. You will simply make us less competitive in the global market. Other nations are in the process of phasing out gas and diesel vehicles. Britain aims for all cars to be zero-emission by 2040. India wants all new vehicles to be electric by 2030. China may soon propose a ban and currently requires automakers to ensure that 10% of car sales are electric vehicles by 2019.

Your fossil fuel-focused “America First” energy plan threatens to make America last instead.

President Trump, if you join the worldwide energy transition, you will create good-paying jobs for the American people. U.S. clean energy jobs already outnumber fossil fuel jobs by 5 to 1, according to the Department of Energy 2017 U.S. Energy and Employment Report. In addition, millions of sustainability jobs — such as weatherizing homes — cannot be sent offshore. Clean energy jobs pay wages above the national median and are available in every community, large or small. Solar installer is poised to become the fastest-growing occupation in the United States over the next 10 years.

America can either lead the clean energy revolution — or the world will move on without us.

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