

## 19089 SMALL COUNTRIES LEAD BIG ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The most valuable resource at the World Economic Forum at Davos is time. No one has enough of it, so everyone makes compromises to make the most of it. The President of Costa Rica is no exception so his latest interview takes place in the presidential SUV on his way to the conference center.

If the Costa Rican president gets his way, vehicles like the SUV will become a rare sight in his own country. In February, his government will pledge to abolish entirely the use of fossil fuels in Costa Rica, making it the world's first "carbon zero" country. Already, much of its energy supply comes from hydro and geothermal power; he wants to reform transportation so electric vehicles are the norm on Costa Rica's roads. He's at the annual gathering of the world's political and economic elite to make the case that developing countries can lead the world in tackling climate change. "Our ambition is not only to do this on our own," he says. "We want others to follow."

With so many of the top-tier world leaders skipping Davos this year, developing countries had a rare opportunity. President Donald Trump was dealing with a government shutdown, while British Prime Minister Theresa May tried to get parliamentary approval for her Brexit deal. And still involved with the 'Gilets Jaunes' protests in France, President Emmanuel Macron was otherwise occupied.

Instead, leaders like the president of Brazil and the prime minister of Ethiopia made their debuts as the star attractions at Davos. The Brazilian populist underwhelmed with a brusque seven-minute speech to the conference center, delivered with all the passion of a hostage reading out his captor's list of demands. The reform-minded Ethiopian leader, however, impressed with a livelier address emphasizing his country's new openness to global values and foreign investment.

The recently elected president of Costa Rica also attended for the first time and pointed delegates to his country's extraordinary record of reversing deforestation. The country has gone from a forest cover of just 20% to more than 50%. Now Costa Rica wants to do the impossible again and remove carbon emissions completely from its environmental balance sheet.

The Davos conference has welcomed a cohort of young world leaders in their 30s and 40s, which includes those from New Zealand, France and Ireland. There seems to be a generational shift in how governments are addressing environmental responsibility.

(398 words)