



We can fight climate change even under Trump and a polluter-run petrocracy **By: Dan Becker and James Gerstenzang**

GOP members of Congress are awash in campaign cash from oil and gas companies. The result is a dramatic U.S. retreat from climate leadership.

Rather than shunning science and their constituents' health as they do today, key Republicans once worked with Democrats to fight pollution. President Richard M. Nixon signed the Clean Air Act and other celebrated environmental laws that Congress passed unanimously. The gap between Congressional Democrats and Republicans on major environmental votes, now roughly 85 percentage points, was about 10 points in the early 1970s.

Then industry hijacked Republican thinking on the environment.

On the second anniversary of the Paris climate accord, the Trump administration's refusal to seriously engage in last month's global warming talks in Bonn — leaving the United States alone among nearly 200 nations — demonstrates how far out of line that kidnapping has left us diplomatically. A likely decision as early as this month to roll back a strong auto emissions standard demonstrates how it is playing out in the real world.

The corporate takeover is as toxic to the body politic as smoking is to the body — with this exception: While some smokers never get cancer, virtually every Republican member of Congress is wrapped in a smoggy blanket of campaign cash delivered by the fossil fuel or auto industries — and refuses to act against global warming. Many deny it even exists.

Doctors can't prove that a particular pack of cigarettes caused a particular smoker's cancer. We can't prove that a specific contribution led to a specific vote in Congress. But to quote former Rep. Barney Frank, the Massachusetts Democrat, only politicians "take large amounts of money from strangers and then act as if it has no effect on our behavior."

The oil, gas, coal and auto industries sank more than nearly \$43 million into GOP House and Senate races in 2016 alone, according to OpenSecrets.org, helping install Republican majorities in both chambers. To be sure, the polluters covered their bets with contributions to Democrats — but gave Republicans about \$5 for every one that went to Democrats.

Now they are cashing in. With strong support from congressional Republicans, President Trump is rolling back rules requiring cleaner energy and cleaner cars.

To cheers from congressional Republicans and their fossil fuel industry benefactors, Trump quickly killed President Obama's program to reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants.

Automakers have lobbied the president and Congress to weaken Obama's 54.5-mile per gallon clean-car standard. As early as December, the administration is expected to do just that. If enforced as originally written, the Obama standard, running through 2025, would be the biggest single step any nation has taken to fight global warming. It would keep six billion tons of heat-trapping carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and save consumers \$1.7 trillion at the pump.

And, while China grows increasingly ambitious in developing solar power and electric vehicles, Trump is handing over the pole position in the job-producing global market for advanced, energy-saving technology.

It all adds up to a dramatic retreat from the United States' leadership of the climate fight around the world, a point that foreign leaders make regularly to Trump and Rex W. Tillerson, his secretary of state and a former Exxon CEO.

The evidence that the climate is changing dangerously has been accumulating even more quickly than scientists had forecast: Heat waves are becoming more severe, wildfires are devouring more land and homes, and, as 2017 has demonstrated across the Caribbean, Texas and Florida, the ferocity of hurricanes more than matches fearsome projections.

A quadrennial report prepared by experts in 13 federal agencies and published in November said that since 1980 such weather catastrophes as floods, hurricanes and heat waves have cost the United States more than \$1.1 trillion. It declared that human activities, particularly emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants, were to blame for what is now the warmest period in modern civilization. So much for Trump's declaration that global warming is a Chinese "hoax."

Meanwhile, Scott Pruitt, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, has proposed slashing his agency's climate budget while aides scour from its website anything hinting at global warming's existence. (According to OpenSecrets.org., the energy sector contributed \$256,000 to his two successful campaigns for Oklahoma attorney general, including his unopposed run in 2014.) And, a compilation by the League of Conservation Voters of votes on key environmental issues in 2016 shows the gap between Democrats and Republicans at its widest in the group's 46-year history of keeping score.

But even as the Republican congressional majorities, the president and big oil and gas, big coal and the big automakers team up, we can still act.

Until a responsible federal government replaces the current petro-cracy, states and cities must lead. They can increase their use of clean solar and wind power, improve energy efficiency in government buildings and in local building codes, and buy clean cars for official fleets, among other important steps. Individuals can shun gas-guzzling Trumpmobiles in favor of clean hybrid, electric and other advanced technology vehicles, and efficient refrigerators and other appliances. And, resisting the politicians indentured to polluters, they can vote.

As former representative Frank also said, "If the voters have a position, the voters will kick money's rear end every time."

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