

# Climate Trumps Everything

The new administration could cut greenhouse gases and achieve its economic goals all at once

By Michael E. Mann and Susan Joy Hassol

**Of all the potential actions** in Donald Trump's forthcoming presidency, none will have more long-lasting effects than those on climate change. Just four days after the Paris climate agreement went into force—the first comprehensive global deal to reduce heat-trapping pollution—the U.S. elected a president who has called climate change a hoax and vowed to “cancel” the Paris accord. Trump has said he would block the Clean Power Plan, which would reduce utilities' greenhouse gas emissions and is at the heart of the U.S. commitment to the agreement. And he promises to reinvigorate the fossil-fuel sector, just when global energy production is moving rapidly in the opposite direction, toward clean, inexpensive, renewable sources.

Not only would this agenda be disastrous for climate, it would actually undermine Trump's ability to achieve his own primary goals. First, climate change is not like other issues that can be postponed from one year to the next. The U.S. and world are already behind; speed is of the essence because climate change and its impacts are coming sooner and with greater ferocity than anticipated: 2016 was the hottest year on record by a large margin, and 2015 and 2014 set the previous records. Extreme weather events such as heat waves and heavy downpours are becoming more frequent and severe, as are related fires, droughts and floods.

Warming is also causing sea level to rise at faster rates. At high tide, ocean water stands in the streets of coastal cities such as Miami, and it taints groundwater. The coastal threat of stronger and more destructive hurricanes is growing, too. The costs of these increasingly common events are reaching into the billions of dollars. Most frightening are the likely

tipping points in the climate system—thresholds beyond which unstoppable feedbacks kick in.

We don't know ex-



**Michael E. Mann** is professor of atmospheric science at Pennsylvania State University. His most recent book, with Tom Toles, is *The Madhouse Effect: How Climate Change Denial Is Threatening Our Planet, Destroying Our Politics, and Driving Us Crazy* (Columbia University Press, 2016). **Susan Joy Hassol** is director of the nonprofit Climate Communication. She recently co-authored “(Un)Natural Disasters: Communicating Linkages between Extreme Events and Climate Change,” in the World Meteorological Organization's *Bulletin*.

actly where such points of no return are until we've passed them. Every year that we delay action, we increase the risk of crossing dangerous thresholds, and we commit our generation and our children's to more devastating outcomes.

Second, because emissions anywhere result in climate change everywhere, we are part of a community of nations that must work together to tackle this global problem. The U.S. has always prided itself on being a leader, not a laggard. We were one of the first nations, along with China, to ratify the Paris Agreement, which is part of a larger international treaty signed by George H. W. Bush in 1992 (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). The Paris Agreement has rules, which we agreed to, including that once in effect, no country can withdraw from the agreement for at least four years. If our new president were to pull out, our country would be an international outlaw, with consequences for our status among nations. We would also be relinquishing the leadership that prompts China and other nations to reach for more ambitious emissions reductions. Instead the U.S. would become an impediment to progress.

Finally—and perhaps this is where all Americans can find common ground—the clean energy revolution is well under way. The rest of the world is no longer debating climate change; it is moving on with a rapid transition to carbon-free energy. Do we want to be left behind in the great economic revolution of the 21st century? Or do we want to compete in the clean energy race, improving our international competitiveness and making our nation even greater? Do we want to buy solar panels and wind turbines from China, or do we want to manufacture and sell them to China and everywhere else?

If the U.S. is to accomplish what Trump says he wants for our nation—economic growth, job creation, improved infrastructure and international respect—then we need to lead the world in clean energy research, development and deployment. In doing so, we would also be keeping our air and water clean, making our businesses more efficient, improving our health and protecting our children's future. Surely, these are values we can all agree on. ■

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