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Russiagate Trumps Environmental Catastrophe for the Dismal Democrats



Photo by Nathaniel St. Clair

If historians still exist years from now, some of them will be struck by how Donald Trump's Democratic Party critics and their media allies obsessed over the 45th United States President's real and alleged connections to Russia while saying comparatively little about his enactment of a soulless anti-environmental agenda that accelerated humanity's march towards extinction in service to the United States' own homegrown corporate polluters.

The reigning national media politics culture has been mired in the Russia-Gate drama for the last two-plus years. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has been all too quietly

speeding up the end of history with a broad sweep of horrific ecological policies and practices:

- + Pulling out of the (admittedly tepid) Paris Climate Agreement, signaling complete U.S. abandonment of any commitment to positive and coordinated international action to reduce carbon emissions.

- + Scrapping Obama's (admittedly inadequate) "Clean Power Plan," which would have required the energy sector to cut carbon emissions by 32 percent by 2030.

- + Loosening EPA regulations on air pollution.

- + Scrapping EPA rules around methane flaring and leaks.

- + Revoking an executive order that required federally funded construction projects to factor rising sea levels into their building standards.

- + Weakening fuel economy standards for auto manufacturers.

- + Rolling back federal protection of rivers and wetlands.

- + Approving the climate-cooking and water-endangering Dakota Access and Keystone-XL oil pipelines.

- + Issuing executive orders that streamline approval for corporations to build oil and gas pipelines while limiting the capacity of state governments to block those pipelines.

- + Rolling back safety regulations in offshore oil drilling.

- + Issuing an executive order (in the absurd name of "wildfire prevention") to increase the logging of forests on federal public lands.

- + Rolling back Department of Interior restrictions on mining and drilling meant to protect the endangered Sage Grouse.

- + Approving the use of seismic air gun blasts to search out underwater oil and gas deposits.

- + Dramatically downsizing two great national monuments – Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah – to open public lands for mining and drilling.

- + Shrinking the size and influence of Environmental Protection Agency while drastically reducing its criminal prosecutions.

- + Lifting restrictions on carbon emissions from coal plants.
- + Approving the first oil and gas production wells in the federally managed waters of the Arctic Ocean.
- + Disbanding the EPA's former scientific air pollution review panel.
- + Ending NASA's state-of-the-art Carbon Monitoring System
- + Cutting "climate change" out of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Strategic Plan.
- + Deleting references to "climate change" from federal government websites.
- + Suspending federal scientific study of health risks for people who live near mountaintop removal sites.
- + Disbanding a federal advisory panel for the National Climate Assessment.
- + Revoking federal flood-risk standards that used climate scientists' sea-level predictions.
- + Removing rules that protected whales and sea turtles from being entangled in fishing nets.
- + Dismissing the EPA's 18-member scientific advisory board and replacing its members with industry representatives.
- + Ordering the expansion of offshore drilling.
- + Removing the word "science" from the mission statement of the EPA's Office of Science and Technology.

The essentially eco-exterminist attitude of the Trump administration was nicely epitomized two weeks ago when Trump's Interior Secretary David Bernhardt told a House Democrat "I haven't lost any sleep over" over reports that carbon's atmospheric presence has reached 415 parts per million, the highest level in more than 800,000 years. Bernhardt is a longtime energy industry and agribusiness lobbyist charged, of all things, with the federal management and protection of the nation's public lands and natural resources.

In the absence of a dramatic transformation to renewable energy and sustainable practices (something more "radical" than the good starting point of a Green New Deal), we are now speeding towards a not-so historically distant termination point for the planet's basic

life-support systems. Last fall the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that humanity has twelve years to cut carbon pollution by half if it wants to avoid true catastrophe. We are racing towards tipping points of no return.

There's a lot to hate about the vile, creeping fascist Trump administration, of course, but there's a strong case to be made that the current White House's worst characteristic is its determination to increase the rate at which the United States and the global capitalist order turn the planet into a giant Greenhouse Gas Chamber. The environmental crisis we face today (with the climate emergency in the lead) is certainly the biggest issue of our or any time in human history. If it isn't properly addressed, nothing else we care about (including the real and/or alleged subversion of elections within or beyond the U.S.) is going to matter all that much.

Why the wildly disproportionate liberal and Democratic fixation on Trump-Russia-Gate in a time when Trump and his party are putting the geocidal pedal to the metal, hastening the species' passage over an environmental cliff? Part of the answer is partisan political calculation. Real and alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election has given Democrats a "dog [bear?] ate our homework" excuse for the demobilizing, neoliberal nothingness of the 2016 Hillary Clinton campaign (and of the corporatist Barack Obama presidency) and a way for the Democrats to try to "patriotically" delegitimize Trump as the nation dives headlong into its next quadrennial election extravaganza. The RussiaGate fixation has also helped keep alive the flames of the (not-so) New Cold War with the United States "great adversary" Russia, a policy to which the Democratic Party establishment has long been strongly committed.

Another and related part of the story has to do with the dismal dollar Democrats' captivity to the fossil fuels sector and to the broader, growth-addicted capitalist order that is all bound up with the large-scale extraction and burning of oil, gas, and coal (and with methane-spewing animal agriculture). That captivity was evident during the Obama years, when a "liberal" Democratic White House pursued an "all of the above" energy policy that kept the global Greenhouse ovens set on "cook" even while the silver-tongued president acknowledged climate science and behaved in less transparently and less aggressively eco-exterminist ways than his successor.

Here's what a tuxedo-clad Barack Obama had to say to an audience of rich Texans, mainly oil investors, at Rice University's Baker Institute last November: "American energy production... went up every year I was president. And... suddenly America's like

the biggest oil producer. That was me, people.” (“Thanks, Obama!”) That was just one small reflection of the most horrible among the many ways in which the late Sheldon Wolin got it right when he called the Democratic Party the nation’s “Inauthentic Opposition.”

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