

# Chris Holman: Farmers not buying false advertising on climate change

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This week, President Trump signed an executive order “Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth” at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Essentially, the order tells EPA to “suspend, revise, or rescind,” regulations that “unduly burden the development of domestic energy resources beyond the degree necessary to protect the public interest or otherwise comply with the law.” That’s just a needlessly long, bureaucratic way of saying the EPA should do its best to dismantle The Clean Power Plan and anything associated with it. Whether one chalks this up to the fulfilling of yet another shortsighted campaign promise or another knee-jerk attempt to unwind significant legislation put in place by the Obama administration, there will be plenty of questions and frustrations moving forward.

What many probably don’t realize is that this order doesn’t do anything right away. Rather, it initiates a variety of different processes—legal and otherwise—that will have to take place before any significant changes to anything can occur. This will take years to accomplish. The same can be said for how the order lifts the moratorium on leasing public lands for coal. In the short-term, it looks good for supporters of Trump’s piecemeal agenda, but it’s possible that the eventual outcomes generated by this order, which may be no outcomes at all in some cases, will occur after Trump has left office.

In a November Harvard Gazette article, Jody Freeman, the Archibald Cox Professor of Law and director of Harvard Law School’s Environmental Law Program, noted that “Trump could unilaterally withdraw from the Paris Agreement, renouncing U.S. leadership on international climate negotiations. And he could try to rescind or weaken some important regulations, like the Clean Power Plan. But any effort to fully unravel the substantial and meaningful regulatory initiatives of the last eight years will be long, complicated, and difficult, and in the end likely only partial because of the significant legal, political, and practical barriers to doing so.”

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So what is Trump trying to do? Buried toward the bottom of this new executive order you'll find disbanded working groups, rescinded reports and a list of previous executive orders to be revoked. If you're still not sure what this is all about, the first revoked order is, "Executive Order 13653 of November 1, 2013 (Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change)." At a time when wildfires, exacerbated by changing climate patterns, have been raging across Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, leading to the loss of human lives and homes, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of acres, and the deaths of countless wild and domestic animals, President Trump might want to break his silence and reach out to farmers and ranchers with something other than an executive order that assures he will not let the government do much of anything to prepare for or understand this and other climate-related phenomena.

Higher temperatures and extreme weather events will continue to affect everyone, but it arguably affects farmers more often and more directly than most. In the absence of leadership from Congress or The White House, the farmers who will navigate the uncertain future brought to us through variations in climate patterns and local weather events are going to be those who are willing to assess the complex situation in front of them and make the needed changes. Their efforts at building resiliency into their operations will hinge upon things like crop selection, new and improved technology, and a suite of practices that will help them navigate what the climate throws at them. They realize what others do not. Namely that climate change benefits from being like the science that seeks to understand it. That is, whether or not farmers, President Trump, or Congress believe in it, it will affect them and they must act upon that reality.

Like Wisconsin Farmers Union, the Department of Defense acknowledges climate change is a real concern, and Secretary Mattis is including climate change in his plans for the future of national security. Paradoxically, this has not prevented the President from asking for a substantial budget increase for them. Even the EPA acknowledges climate change is real in its handouts. "Climate Change and The Health of Older Adults," a May 2016 EPA handout, notes that "Climate change affects the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the water we drink. It also leads to extreme weather events, like flooding, droughts, and wildfires. All of these impact

human health. Older adults and their families and caregivers should consider how the condition of their health and home affects their exposure to the negative impacts of climate change.” Sage advice for President Trump and the 115th Congress, which according to the Congressional Research Service has an average age, “among the highest of any Congress in U.S. history.”

What’s worrisome is that the reasons being cited for writing this executive order don’t hold up under scrutiny. Federal regulation is not going to change the fact that coal and jobs in the coal industry are—like other diminishing sectors of the U.S. economy—losing to cheaper alternatives and robots. Also, threatening to pull the U.S. out of global agreements only serves to boost the geopolitical position of others and undermine our own. The Trump administration talks a big talk when it comes to their vision of American exceptionalism, but their approach so far has only been exceptional in how ham-fisted it has been. Perhaps they should take advice from one of their own who said that, “what separates the winners and losers is how a person reacts to each new twist of fate.” That was Donald Trump on Twitter in 2014.

In conclusion, Wisconsin Farmers Union’s policy clearly breaks with the Trump administration on climate change, as we acknowledge that farmers’ livelihoods are tied to the weather. Unlike President Trump, we urge policymakers to consider the scientific evidence that atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide are increasing and global climate change is occurring, at least in part, as a result of man-made activities. The best shot we have at winning on this issue is reacting to the science and not to the arbitrary twists and turns that come with ill-fated political gambits like this one.

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