Message

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Sent: 10/27/2020 1:43:52 PM
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Subject: FW: ICYMI: California Leaders Are Wrong to Fault the Trump Administration on Wildfires

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California Leaders Are Wrong to Fault the Trump Administration on Wildfires

Andrew Wheeler
National Review
October 27, 2020

Far too many Americans are suffering due to the catastrophic wildfires burning across California and the Pacific Northwest, with many lives lost and property ruined. According to the most recent reports, more than 35 people have died, dozens more are missing, and more than 10,000 structures have been destroyed.

The great work of firefighters and national guardsmen deserves credit in preventing further tragedy. These men and women put their lives on the line working on the fire lines, running the engines, and attacking the fires from the air.

But Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti did these efforts a disservice recently when he accused the Trump administration of putting "its head in the sand" for not regarding climate change as the ultimate cause of California's latest catastrophic wildfire season. This is disingenuous rhetoric — and reckless — because it confuses the public about the cause of the fires and how risks can be reduced. For starters, there is no evidence whatsoever that any kind of climate-change agreement signed in the past 30 years would have limited the spread of deadly fires in California this year.

Instead, there is ample evidence that California regulatory authorities and liability-insurance rules have undermined active forest management, including prescribed burns and tree thinning, to such a degree that it's nearly impossible to have a "normal" fire season in the state. A significant contributor to the fires is the amount of combustible fuel — primarily dead, dried-out trees and brush — that remains near human infrastructure such as roads and housing subdivisions. As such, it should be better controlled. We've seen the consequences if it's not: Wildfires in California and Oregon now emit far more carbon dioxide than each state's remaining coal-fired power plants.

Yet Mayor Garcetti is not alone in his off-the-mark criticism. California governor Gavin Newsom has also prioritized climate blame in lieu of fully supporting effective steps, such as prescribed burns and forest thinning. The governor's forest-management statements are welcome, but they need to be supported by more robust and sustained action. Local counties often struggle to get permission for tree thinning because state law makes it too easy for local residents and interest groups — who refuse to distinguish forest management from construction or development projects — to oppose and block this necessary work to reduce fire risk. Working to fix this, instead of blaming the Trump administration, is one concrete way California's leaders could help their state's residents.

California leaders also shouldn't ignore how their policies have harmed California's energy grid. While Californians are living with preventable environmental catastrophe, they are also facing a preventable electricity shortage caused by their rush to an overreliance on unreliable "green" energy that ironically has resulted in serious environmental harm. In August, rolling blackouts caused a back-up wastewater pump to fail, spilling 50,000 gallons of raw sewage into the Oakland Estuary. Luckily, families in other parts of our country don't have to say a quiet prayer every time they turn on the light switch or check on their refrigerator. The Trump administration believes citizens living in California shouldn't have to give up access to reliable energy, wonder if their estuaries are being polluted, or worry about their homes burning down.

Garcetti and Newsom, moreover, both fail to recognize the Trump administration's record of environmental protection, reduced U.S. carbon-dioxide emissions, and concrete yet manageable steps to limit pollution. In the past three-plus years, EPA has achieved meaningful progress in improving America's environment through practical actions aimed at achieving real results, including pragmatic climate actions.

The Affordable Clean Energy rule, which was finalized in June 2019, is expected to cut overall carbon-dioxide emissions from the U.S. power sector. Most important, these reductions will occur without putting an entire industry out of work. This rule replaced the overreaching and illegal Obama-era Clean Power Plan, which was viewed as such a clear violation of the Clean Air Act that the U.S. Supreme Court, in an unprecedented action, stopped it in its tracks before it could go into effect.

In April, EPA, together with the Department of Transportation, finalized the SAFE Vehicles rule that will gradually require increasing but realistic efficiency standards for cars and smaller trucks. This rule fixed the CAFE standards set by the Obama administration that forced many car companies to pay costly penalties — projected to equal $1 billion by 2025 — instead of reducing carbon dioxide. Such penalties are ultimately borne by hardworking Americans.

This July, EPA proposed reasonable greenhouse-gas (GHG)-emissions standards for new aircraft for the first time in U.S. history. This proposed rule would control emissions and provide regulatory certainty for our American aircraft manufacturers and workers.

And in August, we reformed the Obama-era methane regulations for the natural-gas industry. These reforms will save about a billion dollars in unnecessary compliance costs while still achieving significant emissions reductions.

EPA is working to fulfill its goal of a cleaner environment and healthier communities. For example, EPA scientists have developed a new mobile-phone application called "Smoke Sense" that allows citizen scientists to evaluate health effects from wildfires, and to test whether health risks are being communicated efficiently.

Under the Trump administration, our country's air is the cleanest ever recorded, our water has never been safer to drink, and we lead the world in overall GHG-emissions reductions. While EPA's approach has not garnered as many headlines as it should, it has proven extremely effective. By taking ownership, working hard, focusing on communities, and establishing realistic goals, the Trump administration has furthered positive environmental trends across the nation.

It is my fervent hope that, in the future, better forest management and wildfire-reduction policies in California and other Western states will produce stronger economic, environmental, and health outcomes than those currently being directed by state leaders. When it comes to intelligent environmental regulation, instead of blaming the Trump administration for their problems, perhaps they should look to it for guidance.

Read the full editorial here: https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/10/california-leaders-are-wrong-to-fault-the-trump-administration-on-wildfires/#slide-1

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