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Op-Ed

## Misunderstanding the Economic Implications of Environmentalism and Climate Change

Rising sea levels caused by rising global temperatures will devastate the primary economic driver in Monroe County—the environment. Concern for the impact of climate change on the economy is not shared by the Executive Branch. President Trump, in his recently proposed *America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again*, has announced a reduction in the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) budget by \$2.6 billion and a reduction of the staff by 3,200 employees (Washington Post). The Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for protecting human health and the environment through regulation, scientific research, and direct action such as restoration. President Trump vehemently denies climate change and vilifies the EPA in hopes of demonstrating support for the domestic economy and preserving jobs in fossil fuel industries such as coal. Yet, areas of the nation such as Monroe County, Florida will be disproportionately effected by the impacts of climate change, and require EPA funding to monitor environmental health. While President Trump can deny climate change and rising temperatures, he must not ignore the very real and immediate domestic dangers that climate change poses to the economy of coastal America. GOP mayor of the neighboring Miami-Dade County, Carlos Gimenez, has made this statement on sea level rise, "It's not a theory. It's a fact. We live it every day" (Hanks). Climate change is a problem with devastating economic implications that ought to extend past party lines.

As global temperatures rise, large scale melting of land ice will result in steady sea level rise. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an organization responsible for

synthesizing global climate science findings to inform policy makers, have declared in their 2014 report that “warming of the climate system is unequivocal... [Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions] have been detected throughout the climate system and are extremely likely to have been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century ... atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, and sea level has risen ” (IPCC AR5).

Monroe County includes environmental gems such as the Everglades and the Florida Keys. The unique environmental beauty and coastal infrastructure fuels the county’s primary economic sphere: the \$2.2 billion tourism industry that attracts almost 3 million people to the Keys each year (Encroaching Tides). The Army Corps of Engineers predicts that the sea level in the Florida Keys will rise 15 inches by 2045 (Encroaching Tides). This is highly alarming considering that 90 percent of the land mass of the Florida Keys is at five feet above sea level or less (The Nature Conservancy). Sea level rise will contribute environmental damage during the hurricane season when strong winds and currents will lift the ocean further onto land, exacerbating flooding, and damaging infrastructure. The sea level rise and flooding also pose a threat to the fragile ecosystems in the Everglades as the intrusion of saltwater will degrade both above and below ground freshwater sources. As ecosystems degrade, demand for tourism will decrease.

Climate change is threatening the very environment that fuels the primary economic driver of the county, yet Monroe County residents continue to support republican candidates such as Donald Trump that deny climate change. The support of President Trump is counterproductive as he actively denies environmental and economic hazards facing coastal communities. In this past presidential election, 51.6% of the citizens of Monroe County voted in

favor of republican nominee Donald Trump while only 44.7% of candidates voted in favor of democratic nominee Hillary Clinton (NY Times).

The solution to the climate crisis lies in the shifting the public perception around the economic impact of environmentalism. Those who hastily generalize agencies like the EPA and environmentalists as anti-business ignore the nuance that fighting negative environmental impacts of climate change will prevent economic distress in coastal communities such as Monroe County. In order to shift the public perception, Monroe County citizens must start a dialogue with pro-business organizations such as Key West Chamber of Commerce. Ultimately, those living on the coast who are most vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change such as rising sea level must act with their self-interest in mind and revoke support of those who deny climate change. Considering that 40% of the population lives in high density coastal areas where flooding, shoreline erosion, and storms are a threat to well-being and a productive economy, more mindful dialogue could have a strong effect in promoting policy to combat climate change (Lindsey). While concern for industry growth and employment is valid, President Trump's actions toward the EPA are highly misinformed and dangerous as the reality of the devastating economic effects of climate change is ignored.

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