

What Northern Alaska Stands to Lose with Trump's Proposed Budget Cuts

President Trump signed an executive order this past Tuesday to dismantle President Obama's efforts to curb U.S. carbon dioxide emissions. This is in addition to twenty-eight other executive orders signed into law by Trump since taking office. More are likely to come.

President Trump's budget proposal for the 2018 fiscal year was also released in March. As expected, the Trump administration plans to allocate a large portion of budget spending to the Department of Defense while cutting funds crucial to climate change research and programs that protect and benefit Alaskans.

Of all the federal programs facing cuts, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is expected to suffer the most, with 31 percent of its former \$8.1 billion budget slashed for the 2018 fiscal year. Over fifty programs would be completely eliminated, including infrastructure projects in Alaskan native communities and programs combatting climate change. In addition, 20 percent of all EPA staff would be laid off. According to a recent article in *The Atlantic*, "The EPA always runs lean, but Trump's proposed cuts would slice into the bone: Thanks to years of sequestration funding, the agency's staff is already as small today as it has been since 1989."

In 2016, the EPA spent a total of \$78 million for infrastructure and research projects in Alaska. With a new administration in the White House, the fate of such projects and the funding they'll receive are of particular concern.

According to Candice Bressler, spokesperson for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, "Many of the communities that would be most affected by the cuts are in rural Alaska, with a high proportion of native Alaska citizens."

The EPA is not the only agency facing cuts, however. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is also expected to face a 26 percent reduction in funding. Under Trump's plan, the work of NOAA, which is the world's leading source of data on climate change, will be placed in jeopardy. In places like Barrow, Alaska, where the winters are warming at an alarming rate and climate change is threatening the stability of frozen tundra, research on the changing climate is critical to human health and safety.

While the administration's budget proposal lacks many specifics, Trump plans to cut \$250 million from coastal research programs that assist communities in preparing for climate-related hazards, such as sea level rise and coastal erosion. This would include completely eliminating NOAA's Sea Grant program, which currently receives \$73 million annually. In Alaska, Sea Grant is especially critical for promoting coastal resiliency and protecting vulnerable communities.

According to research done by NOAA, the coast of northern Alaska is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In Prudhoe Bay, 200 miles east of Barrow, the sea level has been rising 0.94 millimeters/year on average since 1988. With climate change likely to accelerate flooding and coastal damage, NOAA's conservation and research programs are critical for the northern coast of Alaska.

Rick Spinrad, a former chief scientist for the agency, said: "NOAA's research and operations, including satellite data management, support critical safety needs. A reduced investment now would virtually guarantee jeopardizing the safety of the American public."

While the final say on the fate of environmental spending is ultimately in the hands of Congress, Trump has set forth a blueprint for draconian spending reductions.. Trump's agenda is pro-growth and pro-business. Period.

President Trump is moving ahead aggressively to try to fulfill his vision for a 'great' America. But, what will this mean for the environment and human health? And, how can America be 'great' if northern Alaska and coastal communities elsewhere are underwater due to rising seas?

In an interview with the New York Times in November, 2016, Trump claimed, "I absolutely have an open mind. I will tell you this: Clean air is vitally important. Clean water, crystal clean water is vitally important. Safety is vitally important."

While President Trump may indeed value a clean environment as he claims, he is also a self-proclaimed skeptic of anthropogenic climate change, stating that the climate is "a very complex subject. I'm not sure anybody is ever going to really know....They say they have science on one side but then they also have those horrible emails that were sent between the scientists."

He justifies his skepticism by calling the credibility of climate scientists into question, referencing the illegal hacking of scientists' emails in 2009, also known as "ClimateGate," despite the fact that this conspiracy theory was long ago discredited by six official investigations.

Although Trump expressed a willingness to have an open mind on climate change, his administration's actions over the past month make it clear that human and environmental health concerns are being placed on the back burner. Consequently, Trump has no problem parting ways with programs that safeguard us from potentially irreversible environmental harm.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), while a supporter of more military spending, believes that "there is plenty in this budget request to get very upset about. Because these are priorities that, for us, in a high-cost, cold, remote state mean a lot." As chairman of the Senate Appropriations

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, Murkowski sees the value in NOAA's satellite programs and certain EPA programs, including the Alaska Native Villages Water Program and the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds.

While Trump's intention to ease "the burden of *unnecessary* federal regulations" has been applauded by some, Alaskans, especially those living near the Northern coast, have a lot to lose if some of these so-called "unnecessary federal regulations" are removed. Without programs that will mitigate climate change, temperatures in Alaska will likely reach unprecedented extremes, further accelerating the issues of thawing permafrost and melting sea ice by the Arctic coast. Moreover, extreme weather occurrences are also expected to increase in frequency and severity.

With the very ground beneath our feet at risk, now is not the time to underestimate the potential effects of climate change and the importance of mitigation. Congress still has the final say on President Trump's proposed budget. Thus, right now is the critical time to take action. With Alaska being entirely represented by Republicans in Congress, it is crucial that you contact your House Representative and Senators to let them know that you want them to protect critical climate change research and programs for the sake of Alaska's future.

For more information on climate change trends in northern Alaska, visit my blog:
https://marclos.github.io/Climate_Change_Narratives/Graham_Blog.html

Name: Katie Graham

Address: 345 E 9th St. #410
Claremont, CA 91711

Phone: (781) 686-6405

Email: KGraham9402@scrippscollege.edu