

# The Growing Gulf Between Science and Politics



By Dr. Alan K. Betts

It is time to look back on 2016 and ahead at 2017. Last year was again the warmest on record, well ahead of 2015, which itself set a new global-temperature record. The sea-

ice cover, which is shrinking as the planet warms, is near record lows at both poles for the first time. New research continues to point to accelerating climate change and increasing extreme weather. Last year, U.S. communities were faced with costs of \$53 billion from extreme weather and climate disasters.

New England has had more snow than last year, but the winter has been relatively warm so far. We ate our last kale in mid-January, but a new crop of spinach is growing under glass, so we will soon be making salads.

A Yale Climate Communication national survey in November after the election shows that 70% of Americans think global warming is happening, 61% are worried about it, 65% see it as a threat to developing countries and 71% as a threat to future generations. Yet the new administration is pretending climate change is a hoax, because it is a threat to the fossil fuel industry and the libertarian economics that the president does not even understand.

So let us contrast these two worlds; the scientific world with its roots in reality, and the new political world, which is built on power fantasies that change daily, glued together by egoism, fear and a determination to continue the exploitation of the Earth and the poor.

In Washington, making America "great," "draining the swamp," and destroying America's standing in the world are all

pathetically jostling for attention. Indeed the swamp has been filled with alligators, and the new administration seems to be a chaotic mess. When false information is being rebranded as "alternative facts," all that is clear is that our government is now on sinking sands.

In my local store after the election, someone said, "You must be shattered to see everything you have worked for destroyed." I grinned, because the climate system is unaware of narcissistic tweets, even though these are a tragic threat to American values and world peace.

Reportedly, the US military has developed contingency plans to deal with 'illegal orders' from above. The New England states should do likewise to counter illegal and immoral federal policies. Recall that the real Tea Party started here centuries ago. Two issues need to be faced. The states must prevent the takeover of their National Guard by a would-be fascist federal government; and when they are blackmailed with "obey or lose your federal funds" extraordinary measures will be needed to cut funds to the central tax system.

For us all "relocalization" is an important strategy. Here in Vermont, we remember the strength of our communities after tropical storm Irene when some state

offices were under water. Towns that were cut off got to work the next morning to rebuild roads and help those in need. We can do it again, overnight if we have to. As the government in Washington becomes dysfunctional, New England must unite and act.

In December, I was in San Francisco with 23,000 earth scientists from around

the globe for the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union. What a delight to be in a global community of men and women searching to understand the real world and eager to network and share all they have learned. The younger generation knows the challenges that



January 21, 2017 Women's March in Washington, D.C. in behalf of climate change. Photo: John Bos.

lie ahead, but their deep shared integrity will carry them. Those from overseas paid little attention to U.S. politics. The U.S. has surrendered global leadership to China and Europe, but all the work that needs to be done to build a resilient world still remains.

We cannot expect guidance or funding from Washington. It is time to expand our efforts to build resilient communities here, so we can face the future together with moral clarity.

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