

San Francisco Chronicle

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OPEN FORUM

Trump can’t halt progress on climate change

By Jonathan Foley

For Americans concerned about climate change, the passage of President Donald Trump’s “big, beautiful bill” is nothing to celebrate. The newly minted budget will essentially take a sledgehammer to the Inflation Reduction Act — the first significant federal action by the United States designed to try to address rising global temperatures.

Trump’s budget bill passed in Congress without a single Democratic vote. The legislation won’t simply hurt our environment; it will hurt the country more broadly. With the stroke of a Sharpie, Trump rolled back critical tax breaks and federal investments that have created good-paying jobs and reduced household energy bills. The Inflation Reduction Act would have gone on to make the electrical grid more reliable, kick-start new technologies and companies, maintain America’s competitive edge, and improve air quality for all Americans.

Dismantling the Inflation Reduction Act was a remarkably shortsighted move, and no one — not Republicans or Democrats, city dwellers or rural inhabitants — will emerge unscathed.

For many of us who have dedicated our careers to fighting climate change, this was a gut punch. After Republicans secured passage of Trump’s budget last week, I sent a letter to the staffers at Project Drawdown, a nonprofit dedicated to global climate action where I’m executive director, assuring them that all is not lost and that the antidote to fear and worry is action.

In the coming weeks and months, we need to get off the mat and get back to work. There is still much we can do. The federal government doesn’t have a monopoly on climate action, and there are many pathways still available to building a better future.

To start, we should focus on the international stage. While decisions made in the United States still matter a great deal, it is not the whole climate ball game. Indeed, over 90% of the world’s emissions are now produced outside the United States. And the atmosphere doesn’t care about national borders.

Fortunately, the rest of the world is not sitting still, and many climate solutions are accelerating in other countries. Whether we look at China, Europe, Latin America or elsewhere, it is clear that the future belongs to clean energy. Solar energy is now the fastest-growing energy source in human history, growing at 20%-30% annually. Fossil fuels’ days are ultimately numbered.

Even in the United States, we can still make tremendous progress.



Carlos Avila Gonzalez/S.F. Chronicle

Daisuke Sakagami views San Francisco from the Marin Headlands through the haze of wildfire smoke in 2023. While the U.S. is scaling back its climate action efforts, there are many pathways still available to building a better future.

Yes, the budget bill is all but certain to slow down the move to clean energy in America — and hand a huge economic advantage to China — but it will not stop the transition. The long-term future of energy in the United States, like everywhere else, will ultimately be green.

Solar energy, wind power, battery storage, LED lighting, heat pumps and electric vehicles are getting better, cheaper and easier to build every year. They continue to beat the most optimistic forecasts, every year.

Economics are shifting, and clean energy is gaining momentum over fossil fuels. The smart money is on green energy, which is why investors and businesses continue to put their money there. And clean energy’s competitive advantage is only getting stronger. Clean energy will eventually be an unstoppable force in the market, no matter what “drill, baby, drill” Trump and his fossil fuel bankrollers want.

Looking beyond Washington, we can also leverage the critical role that cities, states and public utility commissions

play in advancing climate action. Many states, including California and Minnesota, have been pioneers in clean energy through their ambitious investments and policies. (Minnesota, for example, will require 100% clean electricity by 2040, years ahead of most other states.) This cannot entirely replace federal action, of course, but it still advances critical work on the ground.

In the absence of federal climate leadership, there are other levers to pull and other actors to focus on. That’s how we made progress in the past. The U.S. had its peak fossil fuel use and resulting emissions in 2007. Since then, our greenhouse gas emissions have declined by roughly 20% while our economy has nearly doubled in size. Simply put, we’re not going back to the bad old days.

We should, of course, lament the additional progress we could have made if the Trump administration weren’t undermining science and climate solutions at every turn. However, we can still make meaningful strides on climate change.

For people striving to fight climate change — whether at nonprofits or on their own — the work ahead must look beyond Washington. Cities, states, businesses, investors, philanthropists and others can still do a lot of heavy lifting on climate change, and together, we can move mountains.

While Trump’s actions are a setback, I am confident that we will ultimately prevail. Climate solutions will continue gaining momentum and change the world. It might not unfold as quickly as we want, or in the exact way that feels most logical, but it is inevitable.

As writer William Gibson is credited with saying, “The future is already here. It’s just unevenly distributed.”

Remember: When it comes to stopping climate change and creating a cleaner, more prosperous future for Americans, it’s not game over. It’s game on.

Jonathan Foley is the executive director of Project Drawdown. From 2014 to 2018, he was executive director of the California Academy of Sciences.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Submit your letter at SFChronicle.com/submit-your-opinion

Traffic a mixed bag since Great Highway closed

Readers respond to Assistant Editor Harry Mok’s call in the Opinion Central newsletter to submit their experience with traffic since the Great Highway closure in San Francisco:

Avoid Chain of Lakes

For those who drive, particularly if older, and live in the far Outer Sunset, Chain of Lakes Drive is the most convenient path to the Richmond District and points east in San Francisco, depending on its flow.

When there’s traffic, the new stoplight makes it impossible to turn left onto Chain of Lakes from eastbound Lincoln Way at 41st Avenue. Before, with stop signs, alternating traffic allowed a reasonable flow, though congested.

Instead of taking Lincoln, I navigate to 41st so I can enter Chain of Lakes without having to make a turn. And once you’re on Chain of Lakes, cars can be backed up two or three blocks.

Now with the Upper Great Highway closed, those crossing Golden Gate Park are condemned to slow street routes.

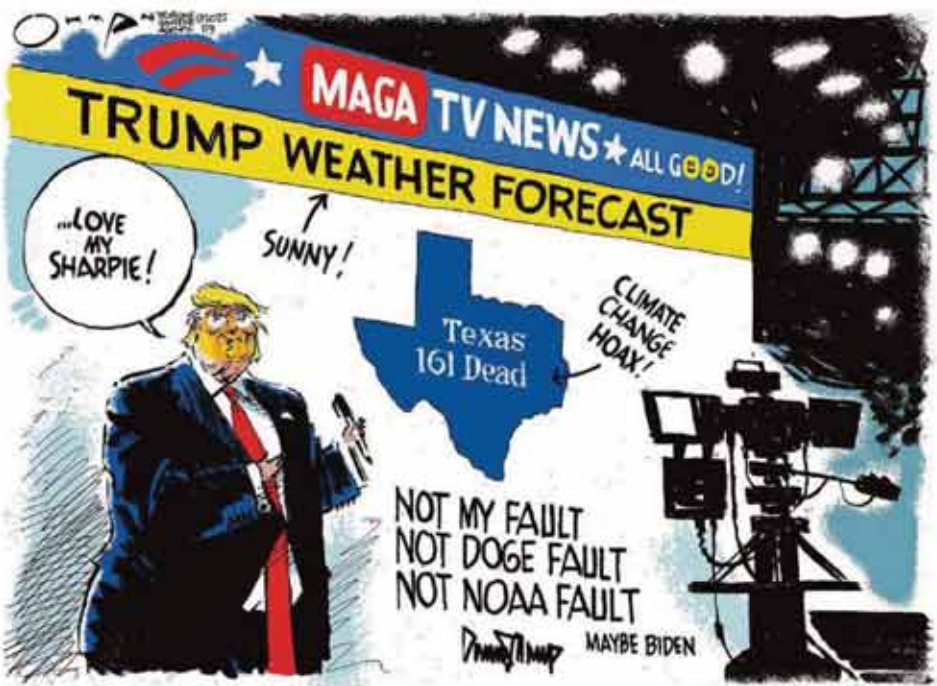
Love having the new park on the Great Highway, but it would have been better to first figure out how to channel traffic more effectively through the area.

James Parke, San Francisco

Sunset more alive

I’ve lived in Outer Sunset near Stern Grove for two years. My wife used to take the Upper Great Highway to commute, but now she uses Sunset Boulevard. She says her commute is faster now.

I am a runner, and take routes



Jack Ohman/Tribune Content Agency

throughout the Sunset after work hours. I am sensitive to drivers running stop signs. This has always been a problem in the Sunset but hasn’t been worse since the Upper Great Highway closure.

Chain of Lakes Drive was always backed up during after-work commute hours; it was not designed to be a commute path.

Every time I see someone saying traffic is far worse, I challenge them. It’s pretty plain to see, while living here, that there have been no noticeable changes.

Roads like Sunset and Sloat boulevards are designed to handle this level of traffic and have done so just fine.

What I have noticed is huge foot traf-

fic at Sunset Dunes park, an increase of customers at local restaurants (Hookfish, Java Beach Cafe, Underdogs Too) and even new offerings like Leo’s taco truck at Lincoln Way and the Great Highway..

The Sunset feels more alive than it did a year ago. As a resident, my quality of life has improved.

Jonathan Fookes

Easier getting around

The creation of Sunset Dunes Park has had only positive benefits.

I have lived in the Central Richmond District for 31 years and have always found getting down to the Great High-

way to be congested, with loads of traffic when it was open.

Sand on the road was frequently a problem. Sure, the beach and waves looked nice, but traffic was stop-and-go.

Now, it is a breeze getting to Judah Street to shop at Other Avenues grocery store. I take Clement Street or Geary Boulevard to the Great Highway, which drops me on Lincoln Way, and at that point, there are many ways to get where I want to go in the Sunset.

I am discovering the amazing coffee and shops that are popping up all over the Outer Sunset.

That has been my experience. Travel from the Richmond District south has only improved since Sunset Dunes Park opened.

And it is wonderful to see so many people using Sunset Dunes Park. It is a win-win.

Nancy Mullane, San Francisco

Speed bumps work

I’ve been driving during afternoon commutes in the Sunset on Sunset Boulevard and Lincoln Way for the past two years, and I haven’t noticed any change.

With regard to Chain of Lakes Drive, it has always had backups at various times, but closing the Great Highway hasn’t had an effect. The Great Highway is still open between Lincoln and Fulton Street, so hard to see where the impact would come from.

What has affected driving in the Sunset is the addition of speed bumps and alternating stop signs. Those features seem to have the greatest impact, pushing traffic onto certain streets and away from others.

Will White, San Francisco