

Trump cuts and the EPA: Making America less healthy again | Opinion

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The most drastic cut in President [Donald Trump](#)'s recently released budget outline is to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA), the agency tasked by law with setting and enforcing national standards to limit water, air, and land pollution; conducting scientific research to protect our health and the environment; and assisting state and local governments in reducing pollution.

Even as the tasks assigned to it by Congress have multiplied over the years, the EPA's budget has been cut sharply in the past two decades. From a high point of 18,110 employees in 1999, the agency's work force responsible for enforcing the nation's environmental laws now numbers fewer than 15,000 people. Despite this, the Trump budget proposes the elimination of 3,200 more employees in 2018 and to cut the agency's overall budget by 31 percent.

A look at the details of the president's budget blueprint reveals the truly radical nature of the proposal. It calls for the elimination of all funding for EPA work that relates to climate change — zero dollars to combat the greatest environmental threat facing the planet, and nothing even to gather data that would let us learn more about it.

The proposal flies in the face of the overwhelming consensus among well-qualified scientists that human-caused emissions of greenhouse gases are the primary cause of climate change, and that a failure to promptly decrease emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and other gases will result in catastrophic sea level rise, along with an intensification of hurricanes, floods, droughts, and diseases carried by insects and parasites. If a foreign government were to impose such height-

ened risks on Florida and other coastal states, we'd regard it as a national security threat.

On another front, even as the administration's budget proposal extols "the important role of the states in implementing the nation's environmental laws," the same proposal recommends cutbacks in EPA "categorical grants" to (mostly underfunded) state and local government environmental agencies of over 40 percent. The budget blueprint asks Congress to make drastic cuts in the Superfund program, which protects the public against exposure to toxic waste. It reduces funding for EPA's shorthanded (and critical) enforcement programs by more than 20 percent, and it zeroes out, in their entirety, more than 50 other EPA programs.

The president's hostility to environmental protection is apparently driven by his fixation on eliminating any and all regulation that stands in the way of profit. So with various executive orders, he's sought to repeal existing rules and block new ones, and with his budget, he's hoping to make enforcement of the ones he can't repeal impossible.

Over the years, EPA rules have contributed trillions of dollars in benefits to residents of the United States — primarily as a result of improvements in air quality that have saved hundreds of thousands of lives and prevented millions more instances of heart disease, stroke, chronic bronchitis, hypertension, cancer, and asthma attacks. The compliance costs to polluters are a fraction of those benefits. The rules' reversal would be devastating for the American public, and it would undercut U.S. leadership in working with other nations to protect people's health and the environment.

The Trump administration's rationale for cutting the EPA's budget — and eliminating regulations more generally — is flimsy at best. The president refers to them as unnecessary "job-killers" that impose significant costs on workers and consumers. He's just wrong about that. Economic growth or contraction is a result of broad factors such as demand, the rate of inflation, and population growth. The best evi-

dence shows that environmental regulations have virtually no effect on overall long-term employment levels. In fact, in a healthy economy, increases in "green jobs," such as constructing solar panels or manufacturing pollution control equipment, are likely to more than make up for any reductions in jobs that result from environmental regulation.

The Trump administration's budget proposal is based on a false premise about the cost of protecting the environment and will severely handicap the EPA in its important work. Rather than make America great, the Trump budget seems much more likely to make Americans irate when their environmental quality declines.

The saying in Washington is that the president proposes and Congress disposes. Let's hope Congress disposes of this proposal quickly and decisively.

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