



Trump International Hotel will host a climate denial conference

Kyla Mandel

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In late July, climate science deniers will descend upon the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C. — located right across the street from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) — to attend the Heartland Institute’s annual climate conference. The theme this year is “Best Science, Winning Energy Policies.”

The conference will feature “the courageous men and women who spoke the truth about climate change during the height of the global warming scare,” as the event’s own description puts it. “Now, many of them are advising the new administration or joining it in senior positions.”

Fringe climate science deniers have surrounded and infiltrated the administration since President Donald Trump was elected — from working on Trump’s transition team, to meetings with top EPA officials. Trump himself has said climate change is a Chinese hoax, tweeted repeatedly that winter snowstorms disprove global warming, and said that climate scientists have a political agenda. And many top government officials in this administration deny the science on climate change.

When Trump announced in June 2016 that the United States would withdraw from the Paris climate deal, representatives from longtime anti-climate action groups like Koch-funded think tanks the American Energy Alliance, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, and the Heritage Foundation were all present in the Rose Garden.

Many of these same think tanks will be attending Heartland’s conference next month, where speakers will offer up policy ideas “to lead a post-alarmist world in climate realism” as well as discussing “the benefits of ending the Democrats’ war on fossil fuels.”

This denialism is in stark contrast to the reality facing the world. Scientists have long established that climate change is real, is the result of burning fossil fuels, and that its impacts are visible here and now — from more intense hurricanes and wildfires to both increased drought and rainfall depending on the region. The very first line of the government’s own National Climate Assessment released last fall states, “The impacts of climate change are already being felt in communities across the country.”

Despite the scientific consensus, the Trump administration has been taking aggressive action to roll back vital environmental protections, often in line with industry demands. Supporting the coal industry, in particular, has been a top priority for the administration.

The Trump International Hotel isn't just a top choice for climate deniers: Last year, two executives from coal companies close with the administration — Murray Energy and Craft Alliance Partners — were “VIP” guests of the downtown D.C. hotel. Last June, the hotel hosted a reception for industry trade group the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity.

The hotel — referred to by one Department of Energy staffer as “Republican Disneyland” — has received hundreds of thousands of dollars from oil, coal, natural gas, and mining interests who come to attend events frequented by administration officials. Last March, the Independent Petroleum Association of America’s (IPAA) annual “Congressional Call-Up” was held at Trump’s hotel.

Meanwhile, Trump has refused to sever ties with the Trump Organization, which holds the lease for the Old Post Office building where the hotel is located. Prosecutors for lawsuits in New York, Maryland, and D.C. argue Trump is illegally profiting off of his presidency; the more guests and events at the hotel, the more the president profits.

But while the fossil fuel industry, and the climate deniers who have received fossil fuel funding over the years, flock to the hotel, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are increasingly starting to recognize the importance of tackling the climate crisis.

For the first time, climate change is a leading issue in the 2020 presidential campaign, and a growing number of Democratic candidates are offering up climate policy proposals. Meanwhile, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) recently told reporters that the Republican Party needs its own climate plan.

At the same time, coal continues to be on the decline no matter what the administration does to help the industry. More coal plants shut down during Trump’s first two years than during President Barack Obama’s entire first term.

Heartland’s conference comes as the head of the group, former Republican Kansas Rep. Tim Huelskamp, abruptly stepped down last week, just two years after taking the position, while offering no explanation. The think tank has in recent years faced funding uncertainties, with even ExxonMobil no longer donating to the organization. As head of Heartland, Heulskamp focused on energy policy and promoting coal at the state level as opposed to vocal attacks on climate science as his predecessor Joseph Bast did.

The news of Huelskamp leaving his post comes shortly after another Koch-funded libertarian think tank, the Cato Institute, quietly announced it was disbanding its climate denial program, the Center for the Study of Science. A Cato spokesperson at the time, however, said this didn’t change the organization’s stance on human-caused climate change.