

The Washington Post

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The Energy 202



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Bill Gates, Ban Ki-Moon and other leaders propose ways to adapt to a warming planet



BY STEVEN MUFSON

with Dino Grandoni and Paulina Firozi

THE LIGHTBULB



Former U.N. secretary general Ban Ki-Moon. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon, File)

Climate change isn't slowing down anytime soon. So it's time to focus on living with its impacts.

That's the message of a new report from about nearly three dozen prominent figures — including Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and former U.N. secretary general Ban Ki-Moon — who say it is time to jumpstart projects to help people adapt to life on a warming planet.

Politics, business and science leaders who formed the Global Commission on Adaptation last year are now seeking to mobilize political will and financial might to undertake steps ranging from abandoning

cattle raising to encouraging homeowners to paint rooftops white. These initiatives will not only slow down climate change, they say, but help the world start coping with its impacts.

“Hundreds of millions of people and billions of dollars caused by damages and destruction,” Moon said in an interview. “We’ll have to prevent that by investing wisely. Climate infrastructure can save huge numbers of human beings as well as properties.”

Patrick Verkooijen, chief executive of the Global Center on Adaptation, which co-manages the commission, said investing in adaptation “is a moral imperative.”

The report, released Monday evening, pushes back against the notion that adapting to climate change is akin to admitting defeat. While measures to meet the emissions-cutting goals of the 2015 Paris climate accord should be ramped up, they write, this doesn’t preclude taking steps toward adaptation at the same time.

“Even if we were to live in 1.5 degree world we would need massive adaptation,” Verkooijen said, referring to the goal spelled out by a U.N. panel of scientists of preventing the world's average temperature from rising 1.5 degrees Celsius over preindustrial levels. “Investing in adaptation is not a tradeoff with mitigation. We need to do both.”

Financially, the reason is simple: It is typically cheaper to adapt now than it is to recover later, the report says.

“We make the obvious case that people and the economy are massively hurt by climate change,” said Andrew Steer, president of the World Resources Institute, which also co-manages the commission. “The reason why Gates said he would join is the 500 million small farmers

who are hugely threatened. Their yields could fall by up to 30 percent and undermine all the efforts” of organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which [spends](#) hundreds of millions of dollars to help rural farmers out of poverty.

The commission’s report estimates that investing \$1.7 trillion in five areas between 2020 and 2030 could generate up to \$7 trillion in net benefits.

The areas include setting up early warning systems for floods or heatwaves, constructing infrastructure to withstand a changing climate, improving agriculture techniques that could boost cereal yields, investing in making water resources more resilient and protecting mangroves to fortify coasts from storm surges.

Often, they write, adaption can be as simple as fixing leaky water lines in drought-prone areas to conserve water or planning coastal roadways with future sea levels in mind.

Investments in adaptation often come with “what wonky people call co-benefits,” Steer said. For example, more resilient agriculture will take more climate-warming carbon dioxide out of the air. And more mangrove forests means more habitat for fish.

But currently, Verkooijen said, only a quarter of the world’s infrastructure spending is done with adaptation in mind. “We need to get finance flowing to infrastructure investments,” he said.

The projects can often avoid conventional construction. New York City could lower the cost of flood protection by \$1.5 billion, or 22 percent, by adopting “green” approaches and playing down engineered approaches such as seawalls.

The authors, though, are trying to avoid a world where only the wealthy can afford to adapt — by either by staying in place and, say, installing air conditioners or by buying new homes elsewhere.

This could worsen inequality between countries and within them.

Migration is a form of adaptation, and as climate change worsens more refugees could head to Europe and the United States.

"We risk a climate apartheid where the wealthy pay to escape, while the rest of the world is left to suffer," Verkooijen said. "Without bold adaptation action, climate change becomes a life sentence to poverty and suffering for already vulnerable and marginalized people.

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POWER PLAYS



National Park Service equipment operator Donny Stewart. (Stuart Isett for The Washington Post)

— **Interior Department is contesting watchdog agency's findings:** The Government Accountability Office's recent determination that Interior violated federal spending laws by tapping entrance fees to keep national parks open during this year's federal shutdown may not be the last word,

since Interior is contesting that conclusion.

GAO took the unusual step Thursday of releasing its legal opinion without receiving a response from the department. So on Friday, Interior's lawyers sent a 320-page reply and said they reject the GAO's findings. In the letter, Interior deputy solicitor for general law Gregory Zerzan argued that while a department under scrutiny is usually provided with a chance to comment on an advance draft of any report, "unfortunately, in this case, that did not happen."

"GAO's unwillingness to work with the Department in order to have a fulsome discussion of this important topic strikes at the very heart of comity between the Executive and Legislative Branches," he wrote.

More broadly: Interior officials argue that the decision to spend fees usually reserved for visitor services under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act was justified because the Park Service has spent this money on custodial services on occasion for several years. They also suggest that since there was no available operations and maintenance budget during the shutdown, this did not amount to picking money from one account rather than another.

"This was not only within our lawful authority, it was our responsibility," said National Park Service spokeswoman Jeremy Barnum. At this point, according to Interior officials, the nearly \$10.3 million in entrance fees spent in January during the shutdown has been replenished through an inter-agency budget transfer.

What GAO says: GAO officials, who approached Interior in May and initially set a response deadline of June 7, said that they granted Interior numerous extensions during their review of its spending practices during the partial shutdown. "But we ultimately have to issue the opinion and

cannot provide unlimited amounts of time,” said spokesman Chuck Young in an email.

Meanwhile on Monday, House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) and Betty McCollum (D-Minn.), who chairs the subcommittee with oversight over Interior, urged the department to defer to GAO and said in a statement that Interior officials must issue “the legally-required plan for how they will remedy the damage caused by misappropriating funds.”

“The Government Accountability Office, under the authority of the Comptroller General, has issued a legal decision that the Secretary violated appropriations law,” the lawmakers said. “The Secretary must respect this judgment, not resort to harsh partisan attacks.”

-Juliet Eilperin



Tweets, a Sharpie and the NOAA: The domino effect of Trump's false Dorian claim

— **Trump official threatened to fire NOAA employees over Trump contradiction:** The Commerce Secretary threatened to fire top employees at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration after an Alabama weather office contradicted President Trump’s erroneous claim about Hurricane Dorian impacting the state, The New York Times [reports](#). A few minutes after Trump tweeted on Sept. 1 that Alabama would be hit “harder than anticipated,” the National Weather Service in Birmingham, Ala., tweeted that “Alabama will NOT see any impacts from Dorian.”

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross’s threat led to the unsigned statement

from NOAA that defended the president's incorrect claim and criticized the office's position that the state was not at risk, according to the Times. That statement led to outrage in the weather community that politics had been prioritized over NOAA's mission. "Mr. Ross phoned Neil Jacobs, the acting administrator of NOAA, from Greece where the secretary was traveling for meetings and instructed Dr. Jacobs to fix the agency's perceived contradiction of the president. Dr. Jacobs objected to the demand and was told that the political staff at NOAA would be fired if the situation was not fixed, according to the three individuals," per the Times.

The reaction was swift: A number of Democratic lawmakers, including Rep. Don Beyer (Va.) and Paul Tonko (D), called on Ross to resign over his threats to agency official.





“I have a responsibility to pursue these truths”: Meanwhile, NOAA’s acting chief scientist Craig McLean told colleagues in an email on Monday that he will investigate why the agency released a statement backing Trump’s claim and whether it was a violation of the agency’s policies and ethics, as The Post’s Kayla Epstein, Andrew Freedman, Jason Samenow and Kate Harrison Belz [report](#).

What McLean said: “The NWS Forecaster(s) corrected any public misunderstanding in an expert and timely way, as they should,” McLean wrote. “... My understanding is that this intervention to contradict the forecaster was not based on science but on external factors including

reputation and appearance, or simply put, political.” He added the “the content of this press release is very concerning as it compromises the ability of NOAA to convey life-saving information necessary to avoid substantial and specific danger to public health and safety.” he said he would be looking into potential violations of the agency’s Administration Order on Scientific Integrity.

National Weather Service chief praises forecasters: Meanwhile, Louis Uccellini, the head of the National Service, applauded the Birmingham forecasters at a meeting of the National Weather Association. “They did that with one thing in mind: public safety,” he said on Monday, [according](#) to the Wall Street Journal. He added the office did not know the source of the inaccurate information when they refuted it.



President Trump speaks during a campaign rally in Fayetteville, N.C. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

— **“I’m not a vain person”**: During a campaign [rally](#) in Fayetteville, N.C., Trump appeared to defend his administration’s move to [roll back](#) energy efficiency rules for lightbulbs by saying he looked better under the energy intensive lightbulbs. “So I signed something a couple days ago that gives you the right to continue to use the incandescent lightbulbs – much less expensive,” he said. “I don’t know about you but I don’t know, I’m not a vain person ... but I look better under an incandescent light than these crazy lights that are beaming down.”

— **Watchdog says EPA isn’t enforcing lead paint rules**: The EPA’s

internal watchdog said the agency is not effectively enforcing requirements meant to protect people against lead exposure in paint. The Office of the Inspector General [report](#) said the EPA doesn't have an "effective strategy" for enforcing the Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting rule. "The EPA is supposed to make sure that renovators follow these practices. But the new report finds that the EPA does not appear to know which buildings it is supposed to be regulating," NPR [reports](#). The report outlines six recommendations to the agency, but the EPA says it will accept two of those recommendations. "EPA believes that current and planned implementation of the Lead-Based Paint Renovation, Repair and Painting Rule fulfills the [inspector general's] recommendations," an agency spokesperson told NPR.

— Environmental groups see a bump in donations under Trump:

Donations to 10 of the most influential environmental organizations in the nation saw a marked increase — between 20 to 149 percent — between 2015 and 2017, according to a new [analysis](#) by Axios. Oceana saw the biggest jump at 149 percent, which its chief executive attributes to top dollar donations as well as its effort to oppose the administration's offshore drilling moves. Axios points out that interest groups on one political side often see donation bumps when the other side is in power, and that even still it's "hard to confirm a direct line of causation between the increased donations and Trump's election. Several factors could be going into this, including an improving economy."

Still the numbers are notable when compared to pre-Trump years:

Just 2 out of 18 groups analyzed in total saw a slight drop in donations in the year after Trump was elected when compared to the year before.



Employees in a lobby at Amazon's headquarters in Seattle. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

— **Amazon employee walkout planned:** More than 900 tech and corporate employees at Amazon are planning to walk out at the end of next week to demand the company get to zero emissions by 2030. It will be the first time white collar employees at the e-commerce giant, whose chief executive Jeff Bezos owns The Washington Post, will stage a walkout, Vice News [reports](#). “Workers with the group Amazon Employees for Climate Justice are demanding that the company adopt a resolution to eliminate its massive carbon footprint by 2030,” per the report. “Compared to other tech giants, Amazon, which ships billions of packages each year and controls a

huge portion of the cloud computing market, has come under particular scrutiny for its carbon emissions.”



DAYBOOK

Today

- The House Natural Resources Committee will hold an oversight [hearing](#) on the “Examining the Proposed Reorganization and Relocation of the Bureau of Land Management Headquarters.”
- The House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis holds a [hearing](#) on manufacturing jobs.
- The House Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on the Environment hold a hearing on PFAS contamination and corporate accountability.
- Politico hosts an [event](#) on clean energy's future.

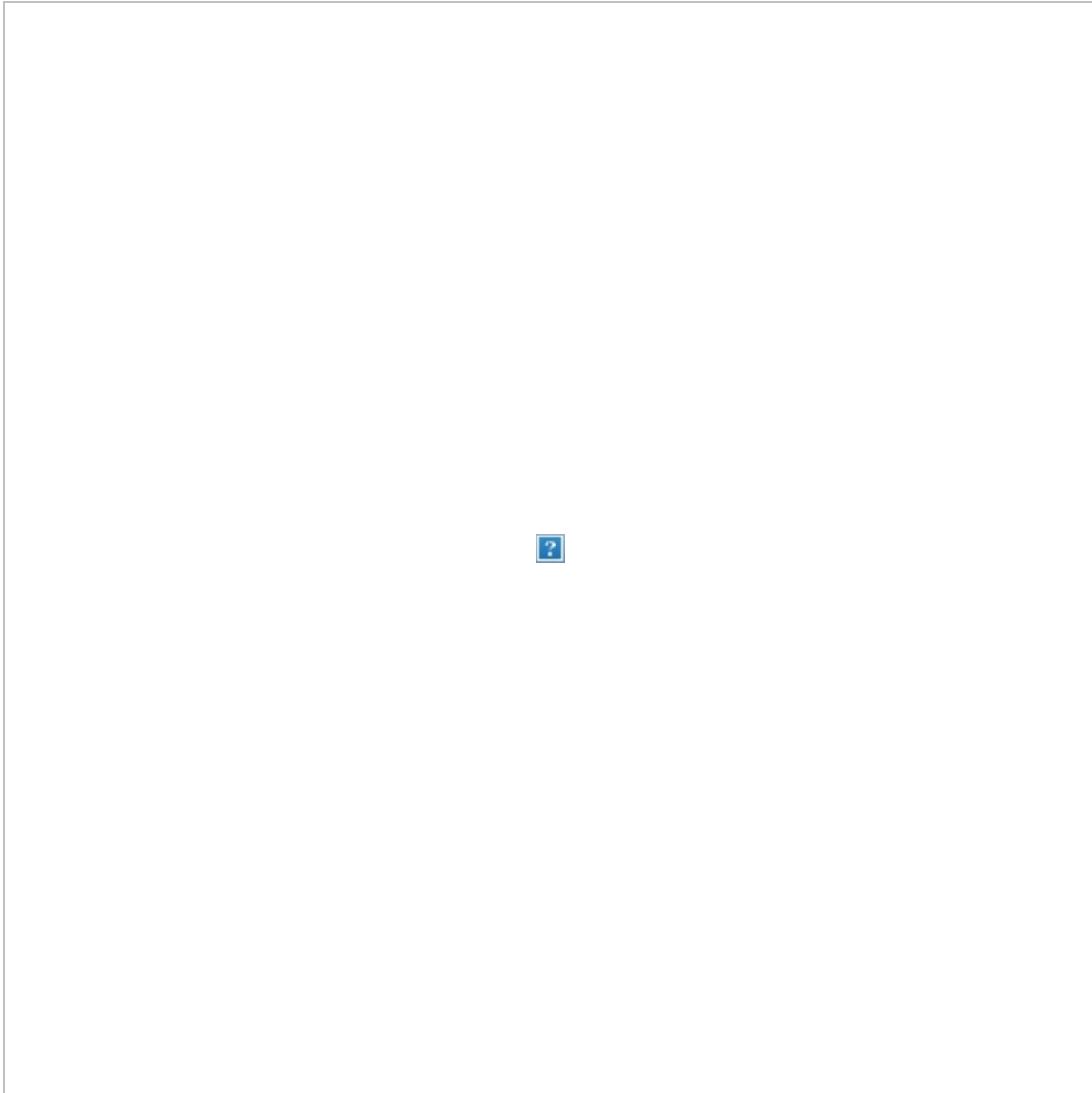
Coming Up

- The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee holds a nomination [hearing](#) on Wednesday.
- The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy holds a hearing on various legislation on Wednesday.
- The House Financial Services Subcommittee on National Security, International Development and Monetary Policy holds a [hearing](#) on the economic impacts of climate change on Wednesday.



EXTRA MILEAGE

— A photo shared via CNN's Steve Brusk shows a lightning strike behind Air Force One after the president arrived in North Carolina:



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Democracy Dies in Darkness

