

---

# The President Should Heed the Business Community on Climate Change

Friday, April 7, 2017

## Author(s)

Adam Rosenblatt

*This post was written with the assistance of Lauren Smith-Ramesh (National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis) and Susan Kalisz (University of Tennessee)*

President Trump is a businessman. His goals have included minimizing risk where possible and maximizing profits for himself and his associates. Mr. Trump's success has been at least partly determined by his ability to take advantage of opportunities and anticipate problems better than his competitors.

Climate change is a problem that should demand attention from business leaders because it stands to impact diverse economic sectors in a variety of ways. A substantial number of the largest and most successful companies in the world, from Starbucks and Coca-Cola to Levi Strauss and Walmart, are focusing on climate change issues because, [as Coca-Cola puts it \(http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/position-statement-on-climate-protection\)](http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/position-statement-on-climate-protection), "we recognize that climate change may have long-term direct and indirect implications for our business and supply chain." These companies and many others are betting on the predicted negative effects of climate change-driven droughts, heat waves, and major storm events on their operations and are responding accordingly.

At the local scale, [Levi Strauss, in partnership with the Better Cotton Initiative](#)

---

---

[\(https://rctom.hbs.org/submission/insulating-levis-from-climate-change/\)](https://rctom.hbs.org/submission/insulating-levis-from-climate-change/), is working with cotton farmers to increase water use efficiency of cotton plants in anticipation of potential future droughts. [Starbucks, in cooperation with Conservation International \(https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/environment/climate-change\)](https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/environment/climate-change), is working with coffee growers to develop shading approaches to combat heat stress and drought conditions that threaten their coffee crops.

Yet Trump, whose company is built on diverse property holdings, appears to view climate change differently. On the campaign trail he [called climate change a “hoax” \(http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jun/03/hillary-clinton/yes-donald-trump-did-call-climate-change-chinese-h/\)](http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jun/03/hillary-clinton/yes-donald-trump-did-call-climate-change-chinese-h/), and as president he has [issued an executive order \(https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/28/climate/trump-executive-order-climate-change.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/28/climate/trump-executive-order-climate-change.html) that largely dismantles former President Obama’s climate change mitigation initiatives. These actions have led to [calls from many companies \(https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/business/energy-environment/trump-business-climate-policy.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/business/energy-environment/trump-business-climate-policy.html), including Apple, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and General Electric, for the U.S. to remain engaged in the Paris climate agreement and not cede leadership to other countries.

If Trump was only concerned with the long-term viability of his own business, he might start taking precautions in anticipation of ongoing climate change. Many of his prime properties sit along ocean coastlines and will be threatened by climate change-driven sea level rise. According to flood insurance rate maps (FIRMs) produced by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), three of his coastal properties in the U.S. (two golf courses in Florida and Mar-a-Lago) are currently located in low flood risk areas. However, FIRMs for the Florida properties have not been updated for 34 years and FEMA is in the process of revising them. Based on information from Palm Beach County, one of the golf courses is expected to be re-classified into a higher flood risk category and the Mar-a-Lago property, [valued at \\$200-300 million \(http://www.politico.com/story/2015/08/trump-obama-kerry-jeb-bush-clinton-vacation-homes-121068\)](http://www.politico.com/story/2015/08/trump-obama-kerry-jeb-bush-clinton-vacation-homes-121068), is slated to join the highest flood risk category. According to FEMA, this means Mar-a-Lago has a 26% chance of suffering from major flooding and being battered by storm-driven waves over the next 30 years.

The outlook for these properties may be even worse since FIRMs are informed by current flooding patterns, not scientific projections of future flood scenarios that could be much more severe. [An analysis carried out by Coastal Risk Consulting \(https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/06/donald-trump-climate-change-florida-resort\)](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/06/donald-trump-climate-change-florida-resort), an independent climate adaptation consulting company that uses data from many sources including FEMA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, found that Mar-a-Lago could be inundated by at least a foot of standing water for 210 days per year within 30 years because of projected climate change-driven sea level rise.

Climate change will likely cause considerable damage to some of Trump’s own properties, potentially costing him millions of dollars. It would seem that the savvy business move would be to make arrangements to stave off the most costly and damaging near-term effects for as long as possible, while also pressuring domestic policymakers and the international community to take swift and decisive action to mitigate the long-term effects of climate change.

In fact, Trump has already done both of these things to varying degrees: he has applied for permission to build a sea wall to protect his golf course in Ireland from [“global warming and its effects.” \(http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/donald-trump-climate-change-golf-course-223436\)](http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/donald-trump-climate-change-golf-course-223436) He

has also previously called on world leaders to take actions to limit climate change by [endorsing a full page ad \(http://grist.org/politics/donald-trump-climate-action-new-york-times/\)](http://grist.org/politics/donald-trump-climate-action-new-york-times/) to that effect in the New York Times on December 6, 2009.

Trump appears fully aware that climate change could harm his business empire, yet he altered his stance and message as a campaigner (and now president) to appeal to a segment of the electorate that denies the reality of climate change. But for the good of American businesses, and the country in general, the president would be wise to abandon this partisan stance. Instead, in the case of climate change, he should trust his extensive experience as a businessman and use his new position of power to confront it head-on.

To support short-term adaptation efforts across the American economy, Trump could promote and expand the [U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit \(https://toolkit.climate.gov/\)](https://toolkit.climate.gov/), a centralized resource that companies and the public sector can use to understand local climate change-related risks. To support long-term climate change mitigation goals, he could maintain and develop U.S. leadership within the framework of the landmark Paris Agreement. This path might be unpopular with some of the voters who elected him, but if he chooses to follow it he may reap the financial rewards personally, and ultimately the rest of us would be better off for it as well.

Image: Wikipedia Commons

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.aaaspolicyfellowships.org/blog/president-should-heed-business-community-climate-change>

**List of links present in page**

- <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/position-statement-on-climate-protection>
- <https://rctom.hbs.org/submission/insulating-levis-from-climate-change/>
- <https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/environment/climate-change>
- <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jun/03/hillary-clinton/yes-donald-trump-did-call-climate-change-chinese-h/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/28/climate/trump-executive-order-climate-change.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/business/energy-environment/trump-business-climate-policy.html>
- <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/08/trump-obama-kerry-jeb-bush-clinton-vacation-homes-121068>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/06/donald-trump-climate-change-florida-resort>
- <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/donald-trump-climate-change-golf-course-223436>
- <http://grist.org/politics/donald-trump-climate-action-new-york-times/>
- <https://toolkit.climate.gov/>