

## **What Are We Thinking? A Reality Check on the 2025-26 Budget Proposal**

May 18, 2025

As I look at the proposals coming through for the “Big Beautiful Budget” proposals, I am both shocked and horrified at the implications of this proposed action. Programs and policies that help the climate transition, basic public health education and well-being as well as basic functions of government to track and monitor conditions are all under attack. What are we thinking?!!!!

### **Situation Assessment:**

On March 12, 2025, newly confirmed Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Lee Zeldin proclaimed “...the agency will undertake 31 historic actions in the greatest and most consequential day of deregulation in U.S. history, to advance President Trump’s Day One executive orders and Power the Great American Comeback.”<sup>1</sup> He stated further that “This action “will roll back trillions in regulatory costs and hidden “taxes” on U.S. families. ... the cost of living for American families will decrease. ... It will be more affordable to bring manufacturing into local communities while individuals widely benefit from the tangible economic impacts.”<sup>2</sup> I heard this arrogant pronouncement with dismay, some shock, and a deep disgust at the fate being promulgated on an unsuspecting public in the name of cost efficiency and the American Comeback.<sup>3</sup>

Regulations targeted for deletion include particulate Matter National Ambient Air Quality Standards that limit fine particulate pollution (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) that penetrates deep into lungs to cause asthma and contributes to the risk of cancer, as well as the National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants that control emissions of 800 compounds known to be toxic, carcinogenic or mutagenic in humans. These controls and many others that have been implemented over fifty years contribute to the balance between healthy people and business interests. It has, until now, been the policy across administrations of both parties, to protect the health and well-being of the population. Now, it seems that standard of care is being abolished to bolster the interests of fossil extractive industries – the major sources of these pollutants.

The 2025 State of the Air Report issued by the American Lung Association finds that 156.1 million people, or about 46% of the U.S. population, live in areas with unhealthy ozone or particle pollution levels; about 25 million more people are exposed to these pollutants compared to the previous report; and some of the biggest factors behind the increase include worsening droughts, heat waves and wildfires.<sup>4</sup> These conditions exacerbating the effects of air pollution

are directly attributable to global warming from the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.<sup>5</sup>

In my eighth decade, I recall vividly the days before the Clean Air Act was enacted and enforced. The air smelled like rotten eggs from the sulfur dioxide emitted by the coke works; soot fell all the time both from steel operations, industrial operations, houses burning coal for heat, and cinders from power plants also burning coal. Everything was covered in a fine mist of soot- men went to offices with an extra shirt to change at lunchtime because in half a day, white shirts turned gray, and housewives worried about “ring around the collar” as they did laundry.



In this archival photograph from 1944, the clock at right center shows a quarter to noon, but in downtown Pittsburgh, Pa., residents walked in artificially lighted streets when one of the heaviest smogs in the city's history blanketed the town. Today, only two Pa. cities have air quality that is average or above average compared to other U.S. cities.(AP File Photo/Walter Stein)

Lungs absorbed this particulate matter too. People who lived in Pittsburgh in the 40s and 50s even if they never smoked, developed micro-inclusions of soot in their lungs- termed “Pittsburgh Lungs.” The Monongahela River had the acidity close to vinegar from industrial discharges. No fish lived there and the shore was covered with oily reeking mats of debris.

We looked past this smoke and stink, and fatefully took it for granted that the pollution was the price paid for good jobs. That attitude has persisted in Pittsburgh. Do we really want to return to those days of unfettered capitalists spewing their wastes over everything? Do we really want to return to the days of black skies, stinging eyes, and soot-covered landscapes? Do we really think it is a good idea to allow unrestricted emissions of carcinogens, endocrine disruptors and respiratory irritants into the air from manufacturers in local communities? I contend that the answer is NO!

### **Climate Change Impact**

The Trump attempt to return to a mythical Gilded Age flies in the face of reality. Suppressing movements toward an economy based on renewable energy while attempting to bolster extractive fossil industries flies in the face of the reality of a warming planet. Willful denial of facts about the changing nature of the earth as natural systems respond through the laws of nature to increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere does nothing to halt the harm. Defunding the agencies that research and track the data on climate change does nothing but reduce our ability to prepare and respond. Firing the scientists who study climate systems and environmental conditions does nothing but reduce our ability to lead in a world struggling to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Withdrawing grants to hundreds of non-profit organizations and companies working toward climate adaptation and resilience does nothing but cripple an emerging transformation toward a sustainable future on this earth.

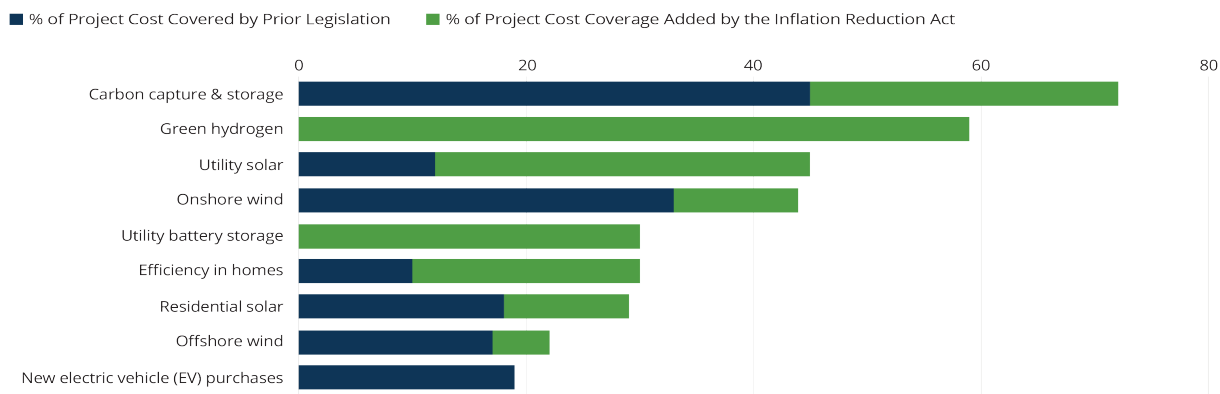
Coal will not keep the lights on; continuing to burn it will accelerate the time when our planet becomes uninhabitable for life as we know it. We see reduced areas of habitability in the US even now at 430.65 PPM CO<sub>2</sub> measured at Mauna Loa Observatory April 13, 2025.<sup>6</sup> The Fifth National Climate Assessment, required by Congress and last issued in 2023, has several significant findings: “as a country, the U.S. is warming about 60% faster than the rest of the world, with the lower 48 states warming by 2.5 degrees Fahrenheit (1.4 Celsius) and Alaska warming by more than 4 degrees Fahrenheit (2.3 Celsius) since 1970.”<sup>7</sup> Over three million Americans have migrated within the US from 2000 to 2020 due to flooding alone, not including flight from wildfires.

The cost of climate related disasters has also increased, and is becoming a threat to significant parts of America. 2024 was a record year for disasters in the U.S., with more than 20 disasters that exceeded \$1 billion in damage; all of which claimed more than 250 lives and displaced thousands of others.<sup>8</sup> As a result of everything from fires and floods to mega-storms and heat, insurers in the hardest-hit states like Florida and California are pulling out, citing the cost of covering homes in climate-vulnerable areas.<sup>9</sup>

Investment in formerly disinvested communities is creating new jobs in the clean economy. Cleaner and more efficient technologies have replaced ancient industrial processes.<sup>10</sup> New high tech companies do not want to locate near polluting industries. If manufacturing is to co-locate

in communities, high pollution levels are not a good idea for public health, unless the intention is to create more polluted frontline communities.

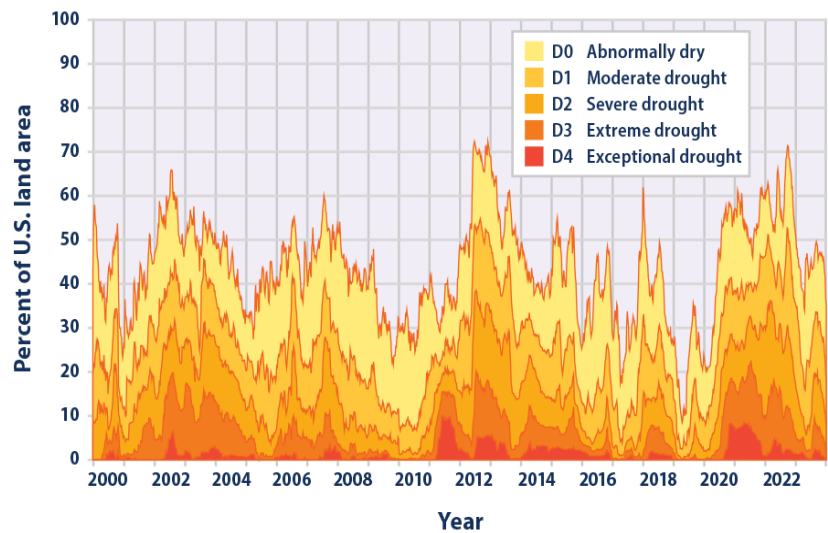
THE INFLATION REDUCTION ACT EXPANDS INCENTIVES COVERING CLEAN TECHNOLOGY PROJECT COSTS  
U.S. tax credits and other incentives for selected clean technology, as a % of average total project cost, 2022.



Source: Goldman Sachs, *The Economist*.

Willful denial of the reality of climate change does not stop it from happening. Removing reasonable emission constraints sets back the progress we have made in controlling global warming. Eliminating the capacity to document, measure and forecast climate effects by defunding NOAA accomplishes nothing but to reduce the preparedness of communities that may lie in the path of hurricanes and extreme weather events.<sup>11</sup> Reversing plans to close aged and

inefficient coal plants may bring short term economic benefits, but at the cost of the health and safety of our future.



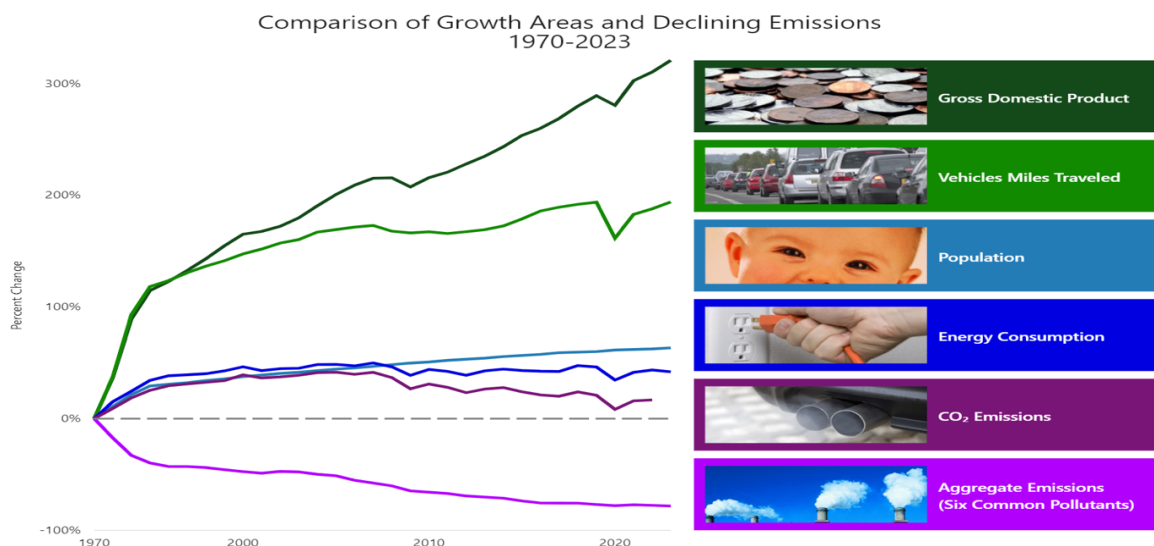
This chart shows the percentage of U.S. lands classified under drought conditions from 2000 through 2023. This figure uses the U.S. Drought Monitor classification system, which is described in the following table. The data

cover all 50 states plus Puerto Rico. Data source: National Drought Mitigation Center, 2024<sup>12</sup>

## Economic Impact

Eliminating emission controls will not reduce costs for commodities like food and manufactured goods. 45% of the agricultural land in America has been experiencing moderate to severe drought for the last five years. In addition, erratic storms have decimated crops at both planting times and harvest times. In addition, deportation policies and hostility to immigrant labor challenges the workforce requirements for farmed land

Environmental standards established over five decades have improved the ambient air in most cities of America. Likewise, water pollution standards have significantly reduced or eliminated most serious pollutants. There is still work to be done to improve the air and water, especially as new chemicals and industrial processes emerge without precautionary review for health harms. But rolling back long-established protections like the National Environmental Policy Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Endangered Species Act and the regulations governing air and water emissions simply destroys the quality of life for everyone. There is no short-term alleged economic benefit to the permanent destruction of watersheds. There is no way to assign a monetary value to a city scape full of clean industries where people work close to where they live without the pall of air pollution burdening the health of every citizen.



Between 1970 and 2022, the combined emissions of the six common pollutants (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, VOCs, CO and Pb) dropped by 78 percent. This progress occurred while U.S. economic indicators remain strong. <https://gispub.epa.gov/air/trendsreport/2023/-growth>

## Call to Action

Congress currently debates the “Big Beautiful Budget Bill” under Reconciliation. Many of the proposed budget cuts will castrate the ability of government agencies to monitor, control, or curtail pollution. Many proposals eliminate programs that millions depend upon for education,

health care, and basic survival. The over 1,000 page proposal is fraught with landmines for the path toward a sustainable future. Call your Representative and Senators immediately.

<https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>

The greatness of a nation is not determined by the number and fame of its billionaires but by the well-being, health and security of the least of its citizens- children, the elderly, the infirm and the veterans. This “Big Beautiful Budget Bill” is not making America great, it is destroying the foundations of civil society to enrich a few already wealthy people and corporations.

## Citations and Resources

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<sup>1</sup> EPA Press Office. March 12, 2025. “EPA Launches the Biggest Deregulation Action in US History. Administrator Zeldin Announces 31 Historic Actions to Power the Great American Comeback” <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-launches-biggest-deregulatory-action-us-history> Accessed April 21, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Frazin. “Trump Administration to Fast-track Fossil Fuels and Mining on Public Lands. The Hill. Energy and Environment. Washington DC. April 24, 2025. <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5265095-trump-administration-fossil-fuels-mining-public-lands/> Accessed April 25, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> American Lung Association. State of the Air-2025. Chicago, IL. [www.lung.org/sota](http://www.lung.org/sota) Accessed April 25, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Annual Greenhouse Gas Index. Latest Data Summer 2024. Published April 2025. <https://gml.noaa.gov/aggi/aggi.html> Accessed April 25, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> CO<sub>2</sub>-Earth. Latest Daily CO<sub>2</sub> Levels. NOAA GML at Mauna Loa Observatory <https://www.co2.earth/daily-co2> Accessed April 25, 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Jay, A.K., A.R. Crimmins, C.W. Avery, T.A. Dahl, R.S. Dodder, B.D. Hamlington, A. Lustig, K. Marvel, P.A. Méndez-Lazaro, M.S. Osler, A. Terando, E.S. Weeks, and A. Zycherman, 2023: Ch. 1. Overview: Understanding risks, impacts, and responses. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. <https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH1> Accessed April 25, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Abigail Bassett. “Climate Change is on the Rise Around the World.” This Week in Climate. Climatebase LIVE. Jan 5, 2024. <https://climatebase.org/blog/climate-migration-is-on-the-rise-around> Accessed May 18, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> <https://climatebase.org/blog/climate-migration-is-on-the-rise-around>

<sup>10</sup> Brookfield Insights. “Inflation Reduction Act Creating Potential Opportunities in Listed Infrastructure.” August 14, 2023. <https://publicsecurities.brookfield.com/insights/inflation-reduction-act-creating-potential-opportunities-listed-infrastructure> Accessed May 17, 2025.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ehn.org/key-climate-research-office-may-close-amid-federal-cost-cutting>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-drought#:~:text=Over%20the%20period%20from%202000%20through%202023%2C,at%20any%20given%20time%20\(see%20Figure%204\).](https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-drought#:~:text=Over%20the%20period%20from%202000%20through%202023%2C,at%20any%20given%20time%20(see%20Figure%204).)