

Midwestern agriculture stands to lose with climate change skeptics in charge

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Body

Agriculture is central to Missouri's economy. In 2016, agriculture, forestry and related industries comprised 9.3 percent of the state's economy and 10.5 percent of its jobs. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the value of sales of soybeans alone exceeded \$8.4 billion. But much of this could be threatened by global warming.

Recently a draft report on **climate change** written by scientists from 13 federal agencies was made public. The report describes that average temperatures in the U.S. have risen notably since the 1980s, and concludes that human activities are "primarily responsible" for observed **climate change**. The report also warns that Americans are already experiencing the effects of **climate change**.

In the Midwest, annual average temperatures have risen more than a degree since the period of 1901-1960. If carbon pollution continues, temperatures in the Midwest may rise an additional 5 degrees by 2050 and 10 degrees by 2100. This would have a catastrophic impact on agriculture and the availability of food for people around the world. According to one study by scientists in the United States, China and Europe, a global temperature increase of 1 degree Celsius is projected to result in a decline in global wheat yield of between 4.1 percent and 6.4 percent.

So it is worrisome that President Donald Trump nominated last month a **climate change** skeptic to the USDA's top science position. Sam Clovis - who is trained as an economist and not a scientist - could become the next undersecretary for research, education and economics. In that role, he would be responsible for ensuring that the USDA is guided by the best available science from the nation's leading experts.

Climate change skeptics are in denial. According to NASA, "97 percent or more of actively publishing **climate** scientists agree: **Climate**-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities ... (and) leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position."

In 2014, however, Clovis said about **climate change**: "It's not proven; I don't think there's any substantive information available to me that doesn't raise as many questions as it does answers. So I'm a skeptic."

His assertion is not only in denial but also is deceptive. The preponderance of the evidence "proves" beyond a reasonable doubt that **climate change** is a reality. Can we trust that he has really considered and carefully weighed the research that's available to him? Any information he is relying on for his skepticism is actually much less "proven."

The same scientists who affirm the reality of human-induced **climate change** conclude that sustained heat waves and droughts can devastate agriculture. Since Missouri is so dependent upon agriculture, the residents of this state

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- as well as those in Illinois, which is similarly dependent upon agriculture - should worry that Clovis will not take these projections seriously.

This nomination extends a pattern in which Trump relies on the counsel of **climate change** skeptics, including the appointment of Scott Pruitt as administrator of the EPA and Rick Perry as Energy secretary. These appointments and others should worry Americans because they fail to take seriously the gravity of the **climate** issue and leave the future of our children and grandchildren in jeopardy.

The Catholic tradition to which I belong celebrates faith and reason, and sees both as ways to inform how to promote human flourishing and the common good. St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis relied on the scientific evidence that humans are the driving force behind **climate change**, and they recognized that it could have severe and negative impacts on all life, especially human life. With many other faith traditions, the Catholic Church regards **climate change**, which threatens human life and exacerbates the burdens borne especially by the poor, as an urgent moral issue.

Despite the president's record on **climate change**, many in Congress share this concern and are working to find bipartisan solutions to **climate change**. Especially in light of the new federal draft report on **climate change**, I encourage hopeful action over despairing adherence to the status quo. I urge my fellow Midwesterners, Americans and especially people of faith to ask their representatives to join the bipartisan House **Climate** Solutions Caucus, co-sponsor the **Climate** Solutions Commission Act of 2017 (H.R.2326), and to find additional ways to safeguard the future of Midwestern agriculture that sustains the economy and culture of Missouri. Through these efforts, residents can promote agricultural sustainability for the region and ensure that government is guided by science and reason.

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Graphic

FILE - In this July 21, 2016 file photo, the sun sets beyond visitors to Liberty Memorial as the temperature hovers around 100 degrees in Kansas City, Mo. A new U.S. report says last year's weather was far more extreme or record breaking than anything approaching normal. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Thursday, Aug. 10, 2017, released its annual state of the **climate** 2016 report, highlighting numerous records including hottest year, highest sea level and lowest sea ice in the Arctic and Antarctica. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel, File)

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Midwestern agriculture stands to lose with climate change skeptics in charge

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