

# THE PRINCETON PACKET



SOLUTIONS

By Huck Fairman

## Columbia professor Jeffrey Saks speaks out on warming Earth

Daily reports this week from many news sources have been listing the dangerous changes that mankind is seeing on the planet.

These include: melting ice sheets in Greenland and Iceland, dying salmon in Alaskan waters due to rising temperatures; the desertification of land needed for agriculture; a cyclone passing up the Chinese coast killing many; record heat in Europe, and indeed July was hottest month for the planet on record, replacing June.

The CNN published a report that Professor Jeffrey Saks, Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University issued as an assessment of where we are, environmentally and politically. What he concluded is that as the Earth warms due to the continued burning of coal, oil and gas, and produces climate-related disasters from high-intensity hurricanes, floods, droughts, extreme precipitation, forest fires and heat waves, these combine to pose rising dangers to life and property.

Our President, however, is not only doing nothing to forestall the worst developments from our warming environments, he is, to the contrary, supporting fossil fuel producers and reducing environmental protections which are essential to preserving the life we have known.

"Yet Trump and his minions are the

loyal servants of the fossil-fuel industry, which fill Republican party campaign coffers," Saks said. "Trump has also stalled the fight against climate change by pulling out of the Paris Agreement. The politicians thereby deprive the people of their lives and property out of profound cynicism, greed and willful scientific ignorance.

"The first job of government is to protect the public. Real protection requires climate action on several fronts: educating the public about the growing dire risks of human-induced climate change; enacting legislation and regulations to ensure that families and businesses are kept out of harm's way, for example by stopping construction in flood plains, and investing in sustainable infrastructure to counteract rising sea levels; anticipating the rising frequency of high-intensity climate-related disasters through science-based preparedness following through on properly scaled disaster-response during and after storm events; and most importantly for the future, spearheading the rapid transition to zero-carbon energy to prevent much greater calamities in the years ahead," he added.

Saks went on to discuss the president's views on climate change and how he has interpreted the facts.

"Trump blithely disregards scientific findings about climate change and thereby exposes the nation to unprecedented risks,"

Saks said. "The officials he has appointed to the Environmental Protection Agency and other relevant parts of government are industry cronies and lobbyists far more interested in self-enrichment, padding their accounts, and helping their once-and-future employers than in doing their current jobs."

Saks further continued to discuss the treatment of the citizens of Puerto Rico following the destruction of the province after Hurricane Maria.

"Trump's mishandling of the Puerto Rico disaster in the wake of Hurricane Maria is grounds itself for impeachment and trial," Saks said. "Thousands of citizens died unnecessarily on Trump's watch because the administration could not be stirred to proper action before, during and after the hurricane. Two independent, detailed epidemiological studies, using different methodologies – one led by researchers at Harvard University and the other by researchers at George Washington University – have estimated that thousands died in the aftermath of Maria."

According to Saks, the Earth's temperature range is now in a dire situation. One that hasn't seen in more than 10,000 years.

"Recent scientific studies underscore the dire emergency ahead. Professor James Hansen, one of the world's lead-

ing climatologists, has demonstrated that the Earth's climate has moved above the temperature range that supported the entire 10,000 years of civilization. The risks of catastrophic sea level rise are upon us," he said. "A group of world-leading ecologists recently highlighted that critical Earth systems could spiral out of control. The Nobel Prize winning Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change released a harrowing report showing that the world has just a few years left to move decisively towards renewable energy if it hopes to achieve the globally agreed target to limit warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average temperature of the planet."

Saks, in issuing this warning, is doing what the president and other governmental leaders should be doing, prior to actually taking steps to slow and halt the climate crisis.

Greta Thunberg is sailing across the Atlantic to dramatize the need for action. We can only hope that these efforts, and other related ones, will be enough to get people out of their gas-powered cars and trucks and into electric ones, along with turning away from fossil fuel power production. Saks lists the toll to populations – many thousands dead – for the purpose of warning the rest of us. We need to act, and we don't have much time. The warming is accelerating.