

# THE PRINCETON PACKET



SOLUTIONS

By Huck Fairman

## Choosing profits over environments: Auto companies side with Trump

Near the end of the hottest year on record, and as new warnings of accelerating sea level rise are emerging, three large car companies, General Motors, Fiat Chrysler and Toyota, have sided with the Trump administration in its ongoing battle with California, and nearly two dozen other states, over fuel economy standards.

To set the California stage, Governor Newsom described the state's situation as, "We're waging war against the most destructive fires in our state's history, and Trump is conducting a full-on assault against the antidote."

A major scientific report, The 2018 Climate Assessment, produced by 13 federal agencies, warned that "if greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels continue to increase at current rates, the frequency of severe fires in the west could triple." The report added that continuing climate change will bring other destructive impacts to California: devastating farmers, closing fisheries, spurring the spread of toxic algae, inundating homes and eroding two-thirds of the state's beaches.

When in July, California officials concluded an agreement with four automakers to honor the state's stricter standards (to which 13 other states have signed on), the Trump Administration's EPA revoked the state's authority. They have done this despite the decades-old Clean Air Act (written in 1963, amended in '77 and '90), that permitted California to write its own clean-air rules. California has taken the Trump Administration to court to defend its authority. For the good of all of us, let us hope the state prevails. The alternative seems self-destructive.

Those auto companies that sided with California are:

Ford, Honda, BMW and Volkswagen. Several Princeton residents have said that they will be taking their business to them, rather than to those who caved into White House pressure to weaken emissions standards. That pressure took the form of "unusual legal and policy moves against the state and those companies – including an antitrust investigation, that was widely viewed as "retaliatory." Included in the Trump Administration's threats was the withholding of federal highway funds. Sound familiar?

It's a little hard to believe that when simple temperature measurements around the world point to real global warming, and when there is no other credible explanation for that warming but human activity, and when visible sea level rise is global, and when the frequency of fires, droughts and violent storms is also increasing globally – it is hard to believe that in this situation we have a president (and Republican senators) who not only denies these threats, but is rolling back efforts to address them. Clearly the administration is neither performing its primary duties of protecting the Constitution and the nation, nor executing laws passed by Congress (Again, the Clean Air Act). And this is not only an assault on our wellbeing but on the issue of states' rights – here granted for fuel standards to California by Congress.

As Governor Newsom said, Mr. Trump is doing "everything wrong to address what's happening to cause" the fires.

Also, as California is the fifth largest economy in the world, its policies can physically impact and affect what happens elsewhere around the world. In fact, the state has reached out to other countries to replicate and link its environmental policies – Canada being one that it has

coordinated with for over a decade.

Speaking of California but possibly also of the necessary coordination among nations, former governor Jerry Brown seconded his successor by observing that, "California is burning while the deniers fight the standards that can help us all."

The largest, deadliest and most destructive wildfires in California history have all happened in the last two years. And the number of people affected has reached into the millions because of not only the fires but the intentional and unintentional power outages.

Director of Stanford University's Climate and Energy Policy Program, Michael Wara explained, "The conditions that we are observing right now are a function of climate change and climate change will get worse."

Related to the increasing heat, scientists have found that drier vegetation, longer droughts, reduced snow packs and the water they provide, together create longer fire seasons.

For some time, California has been a leader in climate and environmental policies, nationally and internationally, but Mr. Trump has sought to end them. Given the increasing severity of extreme weather events and storms, and the challenges we all face from the changing conditions on land and in the seas, it is most important that the people in this country recognize the situation and support representatives who will respond wisely and effectively – which is not what the President is doing, nor are those around him. We have a brief window to slow and reverse the climate crisis and save our environments. We must demand that our representatives take the necessary steps ASAP, and retire those who won't.