

The green fade: Heated activists cool down, quietly retreat from climate change movement

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Climate change activists haven't run out of steam, but the formerly redhot movement is looking increasingly gassed.

President Trump has taken a sledgehammer to the global warming apparatus as he supercharges oil and gas development, Europe is walking back its net-zero emissions targets, and climate guru Bill Gates shook the movement last year by repudiating its "doomsday" scenarios.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, wants to delay the state's ambitious 2030 emissions targets. She argues that they cannot be met without saddling residents and businesses with "new and additional crushing costs."

Even Greta Thunberg has moved on. The world's best-known climate activist has pivoted to other causes, such as the Israel-Hamas war, before reemerging last month as an ardent defender of the communist Castro regime in Cuba.

What happened? Lee Zeldin, Environmental Protection Agency administrator, gave a hat tip Wednesday to the crowd at the Heartland Institute's 16th International Conference on Climate Change, a gathering of climate skeptics and realists.

"This morning and today, all of you gathered here in D.C., is a moment to celebrate," Mr. Zeldin told attendees at the sold-out conference, titled "Climate Realism Rising."

"It is a day to celebrate vindication," he proclaimed.

Critics of the climate movement argue that the issue is collapsing under its own weight after 20 years of dire warnings and trillions of dollars spent on reducing emissions with hardly any measurable impact on global temperatures.

Bjorn Lomborg, president of the "lukewarmist" Copenhagen Consensus Center, said this month that an estimated \$14 trillion has been spent on the "global green transition," to little avail.

International greenhouse gas emissions set another record in 2025, largely driven by economic growth in China, India and Africa, as poor countries eager for prosperity overrode the small emissions cuts in developed nations.

“I think part of that is just the fact that the public by and large is finally becoming attuned to the fact that there’s a great disparity between what’s been predicted and what has transpired,” said Kevin Mooney, author of the newly released book, “Climate Porn: How and Why Anti-Population Zealots Fabricate Science, while Targeting American Capitalism, Freedom, and Independence.”

He said Americans are doing cost-benefit analyses as energy prices rise, while states seek to achieve net-zero emissions by transitioning to solar and wind power.

“Are we really going to spend buckets of money and reorganize our lives for something that might have a marginal influence on the planet at most?” Mr. Mooney asked in an interview with The Washington Times.

At the tip of the spear is Mr. Trump, who has made rolling back policies predicated on the climate “hoax” a central tenet of his administration.

He delivered a devastating setback to the climate movement this year by targeting two of its pillars: the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2009 endangerment finding, which listed carbon dioxide as a dangerous pollutant, and the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Mr. Trump announced in January the U.S. withdrawal from the framework convention, a 24-year-old accord that created the structure for international climate cooperation and led to the 2015 Paris Agreement, which the president also has exited.

In February, the EPA announced its final rule rescinding its endangerment finding, which served as the legal basis for the agency’s ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

Twenty-four Democratic attorneys general filed a lawsuit last month challenging the rollback. They accused the administration of endangering the public by failing to take the climate “crisis” seriously.

“Instead of helping Americans face our new reality, the Trump administration has chosen denial, repealing critical protections that are foundational to the federal government’s response to climate change,” New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a March 20 statement.

The new reality for Democrats, however, is that climate change appears to be losing its cool factor on the left as other issues take priority, including illegal immigration, the Iran war, the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and taxing the rich.

Marc Morano, publisher of Climate Depot, a project of the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow, said the administration has been “the most consequential dismantler of the entire climate agenda since its inception.”

“I have been on the climate beat for over 25 years, and I have never seen anything like this,” he told The Times. “Trump is gutting everything the climate movement has ever stood for. Billionaires are silent or reversing themselves on climate, and even Democrats in Congress have been mostly silent as Trump crushes the climate movement. There has been no pushback!”

He pointed out that “Lee Zeldin routinely labels climate a ‘cult,’ a ‘scam’ and a ‘religion,’ and he doesn’t even get pushback from reporters,” Mr. Morano said.

Climate groups point to polls showing that warming remains a concern. A 2025 Gallup survey found that 48% of respondents agreed that climate change is a “serious threat,” up from 25% in 1997.

Behind the scenes, however, Democrats are advised to keep the climate at arm’s length in the November midterm campaigns.

The liberal Searchlight Institute cautioned Democratic candidates against using the term “climate change” because polling shows that the issue isn’t resonating with swing-state voters.

Only 6% of battleground-state voters said climate change is their top issue, the institute said in a September analysis titled “The First Rule About Solving Climate Change: Don’t Say Climate Change.”

“While battleground voters overwhelmingly agree climate change is a problem, addressing it is not a priority for them,” the institute said. “While some policies that help fight climate change are modestly popular, Americans care far more about energy affordability than they do about climate.”

The pushback coincides with the 20th anniversary of “An Inconvenient Truth,” the Oscar-winning documentary starring former Vice President Al Gore that launched the international climate change movement.

Unfortunately for climate activists, many of their apocalyptic predictions aren’t aging well, starting with the forecast of an increase in catastrophic natural disasters.

Polar bear populations have increased, hurricane frequency has declined slightly, the area burned by wildfires has decreased globally by 25%, and the number of people killed in natural disasters has plummeted by 97% over the past 100 years, according to data Mr. Lomborg cited in the May 2026 issue of National Review.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, New York Democrat, warned in 2019 that “the world’s going to end in 12 years if we don’t address climate change.” Her forecast appears to be in danger of falling short.

Mr. Mooney credited scientists and analysts who have published research challenging global warming assumptions, despite the risk to their careers of being labeled “deniers.”

He argued that the danger lies less in rising global temperatures than in the prospect of centralized government control, meaning another collectivist movement could rise from the ashes if the climate movement falters.

“I think we’ll still be fighting this battle for a while,” said Mr. Mooney, an investigative reporter for Restoration News, a publication of the conservative Restoration of America Foundation. “If it’s not climate, you’ll see a new avenue for collectivism and leftism.”

In the meantime, he encouraged the Trump administration to stay the course.

“This is the big domestic success story coming out of the Trump administration: dismantling the climate-industrial complex,” Mr. Mooney said. “The administration, from my point of view, is aiming its arrow in the right direction. I wouldn’t say the movement is dead, but it’s in its death throes.”