

# Carbon Levels Could Hit Pre-Human, 'Palms in the Arctic' State by Mid-Century

Published on Tuesday, April 04, 2017 by [Common Dreams](#)  
by [Nadia Prupis, staff writer](#)

Current carbon dioxide levels are unprecedented in human history and could reach a level unseen in millennia if their rates continue at this pace, a [new report](#) out Tuesday warns.

Research published in *Nature Communications* finds that if fossil fuel use continues unabated, the atmosphere could revert “to values of CO<sub>2</sub> not seen since the early Eocene (50 million years ago),” a time when humans did not exist, by the middle of the 21st century.

Dana L. Royer, a paleoclimate researcher at Wesleyan University and co-author of the study, [told Climate Central](#), “The early Eocene was much warmer than today: global mean surface temperature was at least 10°C (18°F) warmer than today. There was little-to-no permanent ice. Palms and crocodiles inhabited the Canadian Arctic.”

Because carbon dioxide stays in the atmosphere for centuries, climate change would continue to impact the planet even if humans miraculously dropped emissions to zero after hitting that mid-century peak, Royer said.

Indeed, global warming may have already locked in the Antarctic ice sheet for [unstoppable melting](#)—driving sea level rise and threatening coastal communities worldwide.

The authors continue, “If CO<sub>2</sub> continues to rise further into the twenty-third century, then the associated large increase in radiative forcing, and how the Earth system would respond, would likely be without geological precedent in the last half

a billion years.”

The report comes as the Trump administration [turns its back](#) on climate regulations, issuing an executive order last week that aims to undo Obama-era policies keeping a lid on greenhouse gas emissions.

“Aside from provoking a large-scale nuclear war, it is hard to imagine an American president taking an action more harmful to the U.S. than [President Donald] Trump’s effort to accelerate greenhouse gas emissions,” David J. Arkush, managing director of Public Citizen’s Climate Program, said at the time.

“This day may be remembered as a low point in human history—a time when the world’s preeminent power could have led the world to a better future but instead moved decisively toward catastrophe,” Arkush added.

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## [\*\*In This Passionate Anti-Fracking Town, Civil Disobedience Just Became Protected Civic Duty\*\*](#)

Published on Wednesday, May 04, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)  
by [Andrea Germanos, staff writer](#)

For one community attempting to stop fracking wastewater injection wells, civil disobedience just became a sanctioned civic right.

The community is Grant Township, Pa., which, in November 2015,

had fought off the Pennsylvania General Energy Company (PGE) and the Pennsylvania Independent Oil and Gas Association (PIOGA), assertion that fossil fuel companies had a 'right' to inject wastewater by [adopting](#) the country's first municipal charter establishing a local bill of rights codifying environmental and democratic rights.

**"I will do whatever it takes to provide our residents with the tools and protections they need to nonviolently resist aggressions like those being proposed by PGE." –Stacy Long, Grant Township Supervisor**

But facing ongoing litigation with PGE, the township has taken another creative approach to protect itself by passing a new ordinance on Tuesday that protects those taking direct action to uphold the charter from arrest. According to a press release from Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), which has helped the township craft its charter and wage its legal battle:

*If a court does not uphold the people's right to stop corporate activities threatening the well-being of the community, the ordinance codifies that, "any natural person may then enforce the rights and prohibitions of the charter through direct action." Further, the ordinance states that any nonviolent direct action to enforce their Charter is protected, "prohibit[ing] any private or public actor from bringing criminal charges or filing any civil or other criminal action against those participating in nonviolent direct action."*

"We're tired of being told by corporations and our so-called environmental regulatory agencies that we can't stop this injection well!" stated Grant Township Supervisor Stacy Long. "We're being threatened by a corporation with a history of permit violations, and that corporation wants to dump toxic frack wastewater into our Township."

Long continued, “I live here, and I was also elected to protect the health and safety of this Township. I will do whatever it takes to provide our residents with the tools and protections they need to nonviolently resist aggressions like those being proposed by PGE.”

Among those expressing support for the ordinance is noted climate activist Tim DeChristopher, who said, “I’m encouraged to see an entire community and its elected officials asserting their rights to defend their community from the assaults of the fossil fuel industry.”

He took to Twitter to praise the move as well, [calling](#) it “one of the boldest moves to stop the natural gas industry’s attacks on our communities, climate and democracy.”

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## [Super PACs and Trump’s Wife: How a Photo Dispute Highlights Weakness in Campaign Finance Rules](#)

by Robert Faturechi ProPublica, March 31, 2016, 8 a.m.

There’s no evidence to support Donald Trump’s claim that Ted Cruz played a role in a super PAC’s attack on his wife.

But federal rules barring coordination between candidates and the super PACs that support them have been so rarely enforced

that even if Trump were right, it's uncertain the Cruz campaign would be penalized.

The question arose last week, when a super PAC called "Make America Awesome" rolled out a digital ad targeting Utah voters that featured Trump's wife, Melania, posing nude for the British edition of GQ magazine more than 15 years ago.

"Meet Melania Trump. Your next first lady," the ad read. "Or, you could support Ted Cruz on Tuesday."

Trump accused Cruz, or his campaign, of buying the photo from the magazine and providing it to the PAC. Trump has offered nothing to back up the claim. The Cruz camp said it had no involvement in the ad. A representative for the PAC accused Trump of concocting a "weird conspiracy theory." And the original photographer [denied](#) giving approval for anyone but GQ to use the photo.

Suppose, though, that evidence does emerge to show a link. It would be up to the Federal Election Commission, which is supposed to police the conduct of campaigns and political action committees, to determine if it is illegal for a candidate to buy or produce content that a super PAC then parlays into an ad. If history is any guide, it's not a sure bet the FEC would do anything about it.

Super PACs are committees that can accept donations of any dollar amount and can promote candidates as long as they don't coordinate with their campaigns. Candidates can't solicit large donations for super PACs, and, before an election, they're not allowed to strategize with the groups on what kind of ads to craft or where to run them. If they could coordinate, dollar caps on contributions to candidates would become virtually meaningless.

But the definition of illegal coordination is narrow. A super PAC, for example, can host a fundraiser, and invite its favored candidate to headline the event and solicit money from

guests. Candidates can also publicly post information about their ad buys, allowing super PACs to determine where the campaign might need reinforcements. In recent years, both parties were found to be releasing granular data about ads or polls on obscure Twitter feeds in apparent attempts to get around coordination rules.

That line gets blurrier when it comes to super PACs that repurpose content from campaigns. A number of candidates have posted hours of polished video footage of themselves online, where super PACs can grab clips to use in ads.

Daniel Weiner, an attorney at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University law school, said candidates “laundering this stuff” by putting the content online and into the public sphere is “not a get out of jail free card.” But, he said, it does help campaigns dodge liability 2014 whereas “if it’s something the campaign sent directly (to the super PAC), that could be an indication they really wanted you to use it.”

While advocates for stronger regulation have argued that sort of repurposing is illegal, the FEC’s three Republican appointees (the commission is evenly divided by party) have typically forced an impasse on the issue, [deeming](#) relatively short snippets to be fair game.

Paul S. Ryan, an attorney at the Campaign Legal Center, a nonprofit that advocates for stronger campaign finance regulation, could only remember one instance when the FEC did take action on this front. Restore Our Future, a super PAC supporting 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, ran an ad almost identical to one run by the Romney campaign itself. One of the sole differences was the closing credit that disclosed who paid for it.

“The penalty was \$50,000 and that came about four years later,” Ryan said. “The fine was ridiculously small and it came too late.”

While Ryan contends that it would be a clear violation if a candidate purchased a photo and provided it to a PAC as Trump alleges, he doubts that the FEC's Republicans, who advocate against the government encroaching on political speech, would see it that way. "They seem to bend over backwards to find no violations of law," Ryan said.

For one thing, Ryan said, the FEC could decide that even if the super PAC got the photo from the campaign, it operated within the law because it covered some portion of the original photo by adding embedded text and therefore showing less of the original content.

Weiner, a former attorney for a Democratic FEC commissioner, said he's also not confident the agency would take action.

It's been difficult for the commissioners to find common ground on many enforcement measures, Weiner said, because of partisan gridlock. While the three Republican appointees tend to want a narrow interpretation of what constitutes a violation of the rules, the three Democratic appointees have also hardened their positions. "If they make a small exception, allow a small loophole, they're worried a truck will be driven through it," Weiner said.

Eric Wang, a campaign finance attorney who formerly worked for a Republican FEC commissioner, said Congress designed the agency to be evenly split as a check on the over-regulation of political speech.

"I shy away from using the term gridlock," he said. "Gridlock suggests the agency is not functioning in a smooth manner or in the way it's supposed to function."

The FEC, Wang said, is operating just as it should.

"They're regulating core First Amendment issues. They're regulating issues that directly impact our elections," he said. "You don't want an agency that's regulating our

elections that's tilted toward one party."

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## [Turning Point in Climate Fight as AGs Unite to Target Exxon Crimes](#)

Published on Tuesday, March 29, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)  
by [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

In a move many are hailing as a "turning point" in the climate fight, 20 state Attorneys General on Tuesday launched an unprecedented, multi-state effort to investigate and prosecute the "high-funded and morally vacant forces" that have stymied attempts to combat global warming—starting with holding [ExxonMobil](#) and [other](#) industry giants accountable for fraud and suppression of key climate science.

"This is about facts, and science, and transparency," said Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, who spoke at a press conference alongside New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, former Vice President Al Gore and seven other Attorneys General.

"Fossil fuel companies that deceived investors and consumers about the dangers of climate change should be, must be held accountable," Healey continued, saying there is a "troubling disconnect between what Exxon knew, what industry folks knew, and the company and industry chose to share with investors and the American public."



The coalition of Attorneys General from 16 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands was convened by Schneiderman, who in November [announced](#) a state investigation into Exxon after reporting [revealed](#) that the oil giant had for decades known and suppressed evidence about the dangers that fossil fuels posed to the environment, and then purposely disseminated false information in order to boost its profits.

**“It is troubling that, as the polar caps melt, there are companies that are looking at that as an opportunity to go and drill, to go and get more oil. How selfish can you be?”**  
**–U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude Earl Walker**

California has also [launched](#) an investigation and on Tuesday Healey and U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude Earl Walker confirmed their states have as well. Schneiderman said that additional states were pursuing similar action and that the purpose of the coalition is to work together in this “common interest.”

“The scope of the problem we are facing, the size of the corporate entities and alliances and trade associations [working against science and public interest] is massive and it requires a multi-state effort,” Schneiderman said.

AG Walker said that Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are already “experiencing the effects of global warming,” from coral bleaching and the proliferation of seaweed, to ever-more powerful hurricanes.

“It is troubling that, as the polar caps melt, there are companies that are looking at that as an opportunity to go and drill, to go and get more oil. How selfish can you be?” Walker asked. “Your product is destroying this Earth, and you want to do what? Destroy the planet further,” he added, saying they have “documents” showing just that.

“We will not stop until we get to bottom of this and make it clear we have to do something transformational,” he added. “We

cannot continue to rely on fossil fuels.”

Environmental groups that have spearheaded the call for accountability and investigations into what Exxon knew heralded the announcements and the new AG climate coalition.

“This creates a huge sense of momentum. Exxon may have been able to brush aside a few isolated inquiries, but with more states jumping on board, these investigations are sure to generate some serious waves,” said May Boeve, executive director of 350.org, which on Tuesday launched the website [ExxonKnew.org](http://ExxonKnew.org) to share information about the investigations and petition the U.S. Department of Justice and state Attorneys General to “hold Exxon accountable.”

“The Exxon revelations may turn out to be the largest corporate scandal in history,” Boeve continued. “Everyone is impacted by climate change, which means everyone has a stake in these investigations. A trial of ExxonMobil and the fossil fuel industry would be even bigger than the cases against Big Tobacco.”

As Katherine Sawyer, senior international organizer for watchdog group Corporate Accountability International, explained in an emailed statement following the press conference:

*In the '90s, investigations by attorneys general were the beginning of the end for Big Tobacco as we knew it and ushered in a series of lawsuits that shuttered its front groups, forced the release of internal documents, and held it liable to pay the high cost of its impacts on society. Just as a similar coalition did with Big Tobacco, this powerful coalition of state Attorneys General are leading the way in holding Exxon and the rest of the fossil fuel industry accountable for their decades of deception and protecting climate policy from their profit-driven interference.*

“Big Polluters have done everything in their power to deny climate change, it is time for our justice system to take back the climate debate,” [declared](#) Annie Leonard, Greenpeace USA executive director, who said the AGs’ announcement was “a clear demonstration of climate leadership.”

The coalition includes Attorneys General from California, Connecticut, District Of Columbia, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, Vermont, Washington state, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Appearing alongside members of that group, former Vice President Al Gore, whose 2006 documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* is credited with spurring public debate about climate change, said, “I really believe that years from now this convening ...may well be looked back upon as a major turning point in the effort to hold to account those commercial interests...who have been deceiving the American people about the dangers of climate change.”

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## [New Report Issues Dire Warning About Global Decline in Pollinators](#)

Published on Friday, February 26, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)  
by [Andrea Germanos, staff writer](#)

Pollinators worldwide, from [bees](#) and butterflies to beetles and bats, are facing a grim state of affairs.

Factors such as climate change and land use changes are driving many pollinator species—including 16 percent of vertebrate pollinators—towards extinction. For invertebrate pollinators like bees and butterflies, over 40 percent of species may be threatened locally, a new report shows.

And this all adds up to very bad news for humans, the [report](#) details, as it poses risks to the global food supply.

The assessment released Friday is from the four-year-old Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), a UN-formed body similar to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). IPBES came to its first ever analysis based on a body of existing scientific studies.

“Pollinators are important contributors to world food production and nutritional security,” said Vera Lucia Imperatriz-Fonseca, co-chair of the assessment and senior professor at the University of São Paulo. “Their health is directly linked to our own well-being.”

Describing their critical role, IPBES says that three-quarters of the “leading types of global food crops” rely at least in part on pollination by some of the 20,000 species of wild bees or other pollinators. In terms of monetary impact, that translates to as much as \$577 billion worth of annual global food production.

“Without pollinators, many of us would no longer be able to enjoy coffee, chocolate and apples, among many other foods that are part of our daily lives,” said Simon Potts, Ph.D., the other co-chair and professor of biodiversity and Ecosystem Services at the University of Reading in the UK.

In addition to climate change and land use changes, the report also cites the decline of practices based on indigenous and local knowledge and insecticides like neonicotinoids as contributing to pollinators’ decline.

Among the strategies to protect pollinators suggest entail promoting sustainable agriculture, including reducing exposure to pesticides and bumping up diversity in pollinator habitats.

As far as a real impact from the group's report, Dave Goulson, [author](#), bumblebee expert, and professor of biology at the University of Sussex, is skeptical.

"I would question whether any practical on-the-ground action to help pollinators will happen as a result of this document. We are in the midst of the sixth global mass-extinction event, and we sit around spending thousands of hours writing documents about biodiversity, but we do not take action to address the fundamental issues that are causing this ecological catastrophe," *Nature* [reports](#) him as saying.

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## [About Time! FDA Will Begin Testing Foods for Toxic Weedkiller Residue](#)

Published on Wednesday, February 17, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)  
by [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

Amid growing international concern over the health risks posed by Monsanto weedkiller glyphosate, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will reportedly begin testing for the herbicide this year.

After speaking with FDA officials, *Civil Eats* [reported](#) Wednesday that the agency will begin testing for residues of glyphosate in certain foods, marking the first time in FDA history that it has tested for the chemical, despite its

[status](#) as the most heavily-used herbicide ever, and having been [declared](#) “probably carcinogenic to humans” by the World Health Organization (WHO).

“FDA officials dubbed the issue ‘sensitive’ and declined to provide details of the plans,” according to *Civil Eats*, but FDA spokeswoman Lauren Sucher confirmed that the agency “is now considering assignments for Fiscal Year 2016 to measure glyphosate in soybeans, corn, milk, and eggs, among other potential foods.”

As reporter Carey Gilliam notes, both soybeans and corn are “common ingredients in an array of food products and genetically engineered (or GMO) varieties are commonly sprayed with glyphosate,” which is the key ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup spray.

Independent studies have [found](#) glyphosate residues in honey and soy products, as well as in breastmilk and infant formula samples.

Last year, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), WHO’s research arm, published a groundbreaking report connecting glyphosate, among other insecticides, with various human cancers. The IARC concluded that “limited evidence” shows the herbicide can cause non-Hodgkins lymphoma in humans and cited additional “convincing evidence” that it can cause other forms of cancer in both rats and mice.

“In the wake of intense scrutiny, the Food and Drug Administration has finally committed to taking this basic step of testing our food for the most commonly used pesticide. It’s shocking that it’s taken so long, but we’re glad it’s finally going to happen,” [said](#) Dr. Nathan Donley, a scientist with the Center for Biological Diversity, in a statement on Wednesday.

“More and more scientists are raising concerns about the effects of glyphosate on human health and the environment,” Donley continued. “With about 1.7 billion pounds of this

pesticide used each year worldwide, the FDA's data is badly needed to facilitate long-overdue conversations about how much of this chemical we should tolerate in our food."

Food industry transparency group U.S. Right to Know issued a [statement](#) Wednesday calling the FDA's plan a "good first step," but added that "testing must be thorough and widespread." The group's co-founder Gary Ruskin also advocated for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to "get on board," and increase glyphosate monitoring in its own pesticide testing program.

Only once, in 2011, has the USDA conducted a test for glyphosate and reportedly found residues in 271 of the 300 soybean samples.

"The alarm bell is ringing loud and clear," Donley declared. "The current cavalier use of glyphosate, and lax regulation, cannot remain in place. It's long past time to start reining in the out-of-control use of this dangerous pesticide in the United States and around the world."

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## **Democratic Primary Makes Clear: A Populist Revolution is Coming**

Published on Tuesday, February 16, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

The influential economist Thomas Piketty is the most recent trans-Atlantic observer to note that the "incredible success

of the 'socialist' Bernie Sanders" is indicative of a deeper, populist movement that's brewing across the United States.

In a column published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on Monday and [translated](#) on his website, Piketty argues that regardless of whether Sanders wins the Democratic nomination, "we are witnessing the end of the politico-ideological cycle opened by the victory of Ronald Reagan at the November 1980 elections."

Putting Sanders' rise within historical context, Piketty revisits the period between 1930 and 1980 when the U.S. "pursued an ambitious policy of reduction in social inequalities," with economic policies that included progressive income and estate taxes, as well as the implementation of a federal minimum wage (which reached above 10 dollars per hour, in 2016 dollars, by the end of the 1960s).

"Half a century of steady fiscal progressivity" came to an abrupt end in 1980, when Ronald Reagan "surfing" into the presidency "on a program designed to reinstate a mythical capitalism said to have existed in the past," propelled largely by the frustrations of "the financial elites."

Piketty said this culminated with the 1986 fiscal reform, which lowered the top tax rates to 28 percent (compared to an average rate of 82 percent for the richest Americans during the previous era), as well as the freezing of the federal minimum wage.

Neither effort, he notes, was "genuinely challenged by the Democrats of the Clinton years and the Obama era" leading to an "explosion of inequalities and huge salaries...and stagnation of the incomes of the majority." Indeed, the French economist [rose](#) to global prominence in 2014 when he argued in his book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* that the world had entered another Gilded Age.



Piketty concedes, “Faced with the Clinton electoral machine and the conservatism of the major media, Bernie will perhaps not win the primary.” But he adds, “it has been demonstrated that another Sanders, possibly younger and less white, could one day soon win the American presidential elections and change the face of the country.”

“Today, Sanders’ success demonstrates that a substantial proportion of America is tired of the rise in inequality and these pseudo-alternatives and intends to return to a progressive agenda and the American tradition of egalitarianism,” he concludes.

Bernie Sanders’ elder brother, Larry, who lives in the United Kingdom and is a local leader in the Green Party, made a similar argument last week. Larry Sanders attributed his brother’s popularity to his focus on economic inequality, [telling BBC](#): “The distribution of money from the bulk of the population to the very rich is true and when somebody says it they resonate to that.”

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## [Report Warns that Plastics Will Soon Outweigh Fish in World’s Oceans](#)

Published on Tuesday, January 19, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)  
by [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

The weight of plastic waste clogging the world’s oceans threatens to exceed all fish by 2050 if the world’s seemingly insatiable appetite for the material continues at the current

explosive rate, warned a new report presented on Tuesday.

In fact, according to the study by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation along with the World Economic Forum, “plastics production has surged over the past 50 years, from 15 million tonnes in 1964 to 311 million tonnes in 2014, and is expected to double again over the next 20 years.”

The study—[\*The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics\*](#) (pdf)—introduced at the opening day of the WEF’s annual summit in Davos, Switzerland is the first of its kind to comprehensively assess global plastic packaging flows. The report makes an economic case for what it calls the “New Plastics Economy,” described as “a new approach based on creating effective after-use pathways for plastics; drastically reducing leakage of plastics into natural systems, in particular oceans; and decoupling plastics from fossil feedstocks.”

Among the findings, which are based on interviews with over 180 experts and on analysis of over 200 reports, the study estimates that roughly 8 million tonnes of plastics leak into the ocean each year—“which is equivalent to dumping the contents of one garbage truck into the ocean every minute.” This amount is expected to double by 2030.

“In a business-as-usual scenario, the ocean is expected to contain 1 tonne of plastic for every 3 tonnes of fish by 2025, and by 2050, more plastics than fish (by weight),” the report continues.

What’s more, the report estimates that only 14 percent of plastic packaging is collected for recycling and even less for plastics in general. After sorting, only 5 percent is ultimately retained for subsequent use, which is far below global recycling rates for paper (58 percent) and iron and steel (70–90 percent).

Further, the report examines the carbon impact of plastics

production, given that over 90 percent are derived from “virgin fossil feedstocks.” Plastics production represents roughly 6 percent of global oil consumption and “If the current strong growth of plastics usage continues as expected, the plastics sector will account for 20% of total oil consumption and 15% of the global annual carbon budget by 2050.”

The report argues that single-use plastics, and plastic packaging specifically, represents a net loss for the economy, as its limited value is outweighed by these negative impacts. It states:

*After a short first-use cycle, 95% of plastic packaging material value, or USD 80–120 billion annually, is lost to the economy. A staggering 32% of plastic packaging escapes collection systems, generating significant economic costs by reducing the productivity of vital natural systems such as the ocean and clogging urban infrastructure. The cost of such after-use externalities for plastic packaging, plus the cost associated with greenhouse gas emissions from its production, is conservatively estimated at USD 40 billion annually – exceeding the plastic packaging industry’s profit pool.*

“Linear models of production and consumption are increasingly challenged by the context within which they operate, and this is particularly true for high-volume, low-value materials such as plastic packaging,” [said](#) Ellen MacArthur, an accomplished British yachtswoman turned foundation chair.

The researchers conclude that in order to get closer to the goal of a “circular economy”—where “consumption happens only in effective bio-cycles; elsewhere use replaces consumption”—both the public and private sector must work towards the goal of creating plastics that can be both recycled and composted.

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# [This NAFTA Lawsuit over Keystone XL Proves “Free Trade” Deals Kill Democracy](#)

Published on Thursday, January 07, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)  
by [Sarah Lazare, staff writer](#)

Canadian pipeline company TransCanada [announced](#) Wednesday afternoon it is suing the Obama administration under [NAFTA](#) provisions for the U.S. decision last November to reject the unpopular Keystone XL pipeline.

The climate justice movement that successfully pressured the president to reject the mammoth pipeline project responded on Thursday by characterizing the move as “[pathetic](#)” and saying the legal argument being deployed by the company underscores the undemocratic nature of so-called “free trade” deals.

“This isn’t going to get the pipeline built, and it is going to remind Americans how many of our rights these agreements give away,” Bill McKibben, 350.org co-founder, said in [a statement](#). “The idea that some trade agreement should force us to overheat the planet’s atmosphere is, quite simply, insane. But the oil industry is so used to always winning that I fear this kind of tantrum is predictable. Corporate power is truly out of control.”

“Corporate power is truly out of control.”

–Bill McKibben, 350.org

The corporation said it has filed a “filed a Notice of Intent to initiate a claim” under the Investment Chapter of NAFTA—on the grounds that “the denial was arbitrary and unjustified.”

Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provisions, which are in thousands of free trade deals, allow corporations to circumvent national legal systems to levy lawsuits in parallel tribunals if state actions threaten their profits.

“TransCanada has been unjustly deprived of the value of its multibillion-dollar investment by the U.S. administration’s action,” said the firm, announcing it is seeking a stunning \$15 billion in damages.

“With a single press release, TransCanada has proven what concerned citizens have argued for decades—that the primary purpose of ISDS is to subvert democratic processes and the public interest, in the name of private profit,” Carroll Muffett, president of the Center for International Environmental Law, [said](#) on Thursday. “It has demonstrated to the citizens of the United States, and the world, why these provisions have no place in new trade agreements.”

“We encourage the Obama administration to share a copy of TransCanada’s notification with every member of Congress and every US state legislator as evidence of just what the TransPacific Partnership and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership have to offer them,” Muffett continued. “Millions of people were galvanized into action to stop the Keystone XL pipeline and to say, clearly and loudly, that it is not in the national interest. TransCanada demonstrates why ISDS demands the same response.”

What’s more, TransCanada also announced on Wednesday that it has filed a separate lawsuit in the U.S. Federal Court in Houston, Texas, “asserting that the President’s decision to deny construction of Keystone XL exceeded his power under the U.S. Constitution.”

Climate campaigners say the movement will only be galvanized by TransCanada’s latest stunt.

“The fight against Keystone XL fired up the climate movement

like never before,” said Jason Kowalski, policy director for 350.org. “We’re more than happy to keep thrashing it out with the likes of TransCanada—it will only bring more people into the struggle to keep fossil fuels in the ground.”

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## [EPA Confirms Longstanding Fears About Impact of Neonics on Bees](#)

Published on Wednesday, January 06, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Wednesday [confirmed](#) longstanding fears that a widely-used pesticide can pose a significant risk to honeybee populations.

The first risk assessment released by the agency on the long-term impact of neonicotinoids focused on the [most popular class](#) of the insecticide, imidacloprids. Slammed by researchers as a “deeply flawed” study, the EPA nonetheless found that when used on certain crops, pollinator hives exhibited a dangerous level of chemical residue.

If pollinators were found carrying nectar back to the hive with a greater than 25 parts per billion concentration of imidacloprid, likely effects included decreases in population as well as less honey produced, the EPA stated.

The analysis found that “citrus and cotton may have residues of the pesticide in pollen and nectar above the threshold level. Other crops such as corn and leafy vegetables either do

not produce nectar or have residues below the EPA identified level.”

The *Associated Press* [described](#) the findings as “a nuanced answer that neither clears the way for an outright ban nor is a blanket go-ahead for continued use.”

Lori Ann Burd, environmental health director with the Center for Biological Diversity went further than that. The EPA analysis, she told *Common Dreams*, is “deeply flawed” because it only analyzed the effect of imidacloprid on honeybees, and “ignored the 4,000 species of native bees” as well “other pollinator species, including butterflies, some of which are now listed as endangered species.”

Despite the fact that recent [studies](#) have shown that neonics have an “especially dangerous effect” on wild bee populations, the EPA analysis “focused exclusively on honeybees as a proxy for all pollinators,”—a move Burd describes as “absolutely inappropriate.”

What’s more, the EPA ignored the “vast body of data out there showing that neonics are substantially harming pollinators,” and only looked at a single study, which was based on tests run by imidacloprid producer Bayer CropScience.

“It’s nice the EPA acknowledged that neonics are harming pollinators, but its like saying smoking cigarettes are bad for your health,” Burd said. “There’s no question about it.”

This sentiment was shared by Lisa Archer, Food and Technology program director at Friend of the Earth, who said: “The EPA’s piecemeal approach continues to ignore the risks posed by neonicotinoids to native bees, synergistic and cumulative impacts of exposures to multiple neonicotinoids and other pesticides and fungicides, the impacts of seed coatings, and sublethal and chronic effects that also contribute to bee declines. With beekeepers facing continued unsustainable losses, and harm to essential native pollinators mounting, the

EPA needs to stop dragging its feet and take decisive action to suspend these bee-toxic pesticides.”

Scientists and environmental groups have long-warned about the [dangerous impacts](#) of neonicotinoids on pollinators, such as honeybees, native bees, and butterflies. In high concentrations, the chemicals can be lethal. They have also been found to persist in soil environments and have been [linked](#) to colony collapse disorder, which researchers [describe](#) as a crisis that could impact the global food supply.

Produced by biotechnology firms including Syngenta, Bayer CropSciences, and Dow Agrosciences, neonics are [commonly](#) sprayed on genetically modified (GM) crops and often [coat GM seeds](#).

The imidacloprid analysis is just the first of four preliminary pollinator risk assessments for the neonicotinoid insecticides; the agency is expected to release similar studies into other neonicotinoids—clothianidin, thiamethoxam, and dinotefuran—for public comment in December 2016.

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