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# Daily News

## Climate Report Provides Opportunity for Breaching Political Divide

National Climate Assessment proves problems are already here, supporters say.



Folsom Lake is seen at 17 percent of its capacity in California on January 22, 2014, thanks to a severe drought. Scientists say global warming may increase water scarcity in many areas.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT GALBRAITH, REUTERS

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[National Geographic](#)  
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**Can the U.S. federal government's sweeping new report on climate change break the political gridlock around the polarizing issue?**

One of the report's key authors, Texas Tech atmospheric scientist [Katharine Hayhoe](#), hopes that it will.

The report, called the [Third National Climate Assessment](#), was released Tuesday by the White House and calls attention to ways that climate change is already harming Americans, from droughts in the West to flood-damaged roads in the East. (See "[Federal Report to Warn Climate Change Is Already Hurting Americans](#).")

"People say, 'I'm worried about my health, my kids' grades, my job, and so on, so climate change is at the bottom of the list,'" says Hayhoe.

"But this report really brings home that this is not a different issue," she says. "Climate change is affecting us right now in ways we already care about: our economy, our safety, our health, our food, our water."

[Paul Bledsoe](#), who was a climate change aide in the Clinton White House, agrees, saying the new report "may provide an opportunity for Republicans who have been intransigent about climate science to say, 'This report is interesting.'"

"They may not agree with the Democrats' policy proposals on this issue," he adds. "But they may be able to talk about the impacts of climate change that are happening now in a less political way."



This home in Union Beach, New Jersey, was destroyed by Superstorm Sandy in October 2012. Global warming may give such storms more energy.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KEN CEDENO, CORBIS IMAGES

## Conservative Support?

The Republican Party has often blocked efforts to address climate change in recent years, including a sweeping [climate bill in June 2008](#).

But some prominent GOP leaders have shown interest in working on the issue. The list includes former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, who spoke about climate change on the 2012 presidential campaign trail; Senator John McCain, who proposed a series of climate change legislation in the mid-2000s; former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who signed an emissions-reduction law for his state in 2006; and former Reagan Secretary of State [George Shultz](#), who writes about climate and other issues as a fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

Even Sarah Palin had expressed concern about the impacts of climate change while governor of Alaska, though she ridiculed climate science as a vice presidential hopeful in 2008. (A year earlier, then Governor Palin [created a panel](#) to come up with an "Immediate Action Plan" to help protect particular parts of her state from climate-related erosion, loss of sea ice, and sea-level rise.)

Still, public polling suggests climate change is still much more of a Democratic issue.

[Gallup's March 2014 poll](#) found that just 42 percent of Republicans said most scientists believe global warming is occurring, compared with 82 percent of Democrats. Another 43 percent of Republicans believed most scientists aren't sure about global warming, a position shared by only 14 percent of Democrats.

On Tuesday, some conservative groups criticized the new climate assessment, with the libertarian [Cato Institute arguing in a blog post](#) that it "overly focuses on the supposed negative impacts from climate change while largely dismissing or ignoring the positives from climate change."

James M. Taylor, a fellow at the conservative Heartland Institute, said in a statement that the report is "laughably misleading." He added, "The report falsely asserts that global warming is causing more extreme weather events, more droughts, more record high temperatures, more wildfires, warmer winters, etc., when each and every one of these false assertions is contradicted by objective, verifiable evidence."



On January 23, 2013, a group of doctors declared a health emergency in Salt Lake City, Utah, over lingering pollution, a problem that can be exacerbated by climate change.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK BOWMER, AP

### **A Public Health Issue?**

The new assessment makes a point of focusing on how climate change is harming human health, noting that extreme weather, more wildfires, decreased air quality, insect-borne diseases, and food- and waterborne diseases are likely to endanger children and the elderly most of all.

Public health "is the most personal way that climate change affects us, because it connects the dots between science and health and puts a human face on the issue," says Kim Knowlton, a senior scientist with the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) who helped write the new assessment's chapter on health.

She says health concerns show that "climate change is really not a partisan issue because it affects everyone ... Hopefully, the report will be a foundation of where we go from here."

The new assessment identifies other areas that would also seem to transcend partisan politics. Bledsoe, who is now a senior fellow with the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Washington, D.C., points to the issue of water management in the West.

The National Climate Assessment features data showing that droughts have been exacerbated by climate change, which could help inform long-term policy decisions in the [Colorado River Basin](#) and other Western rivers.

The assessment also says that climate change has increased the risk of wildfires. Recent blazes in Colorado, New Mexico, and California "have had devastating budget impacts on counties," Bledsoe says, as local governments have had to contribute more resources to firefighting.

Indeed, most of the report is practical guidance for officials at all levels on dealing with climate change and how to mitigate further warming.

[Steve Winkelman](#), director of transportation and adaptation programs with the Center for Clean Air Policy in Washington, D.C., says the report "will help federal agencies, states, communities, and citizens understand how climate change will impact their day-to-day activities."

That impact has long been the key for Hayhoe, the Texas Tech professor who helped author the new report.

In a book she wrote with her evangelical pastor husband, Hayhoe argues that climate change is "not about blue politics or red politics or any kind of politics. It's about thermometer readings and history. It's about facts and figures."