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Friday, February 22, 2019

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Dear Governor Abbott,

We recently learned that a group of Texas academics sent you an open letter highlighting some predictions about the future effects of climate change in Texas and requesting that the State of Texas “take immediate action to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.”

The letter argues for action based on the devastation wrought by Hurricane Harvey and on the findings in the most recent [National Climate Assessment](#), predicting that more costly climate disasters are forthcoming for Texas. While we agree that the state should always be vigilant about preparing for natural disasters, it is important to note that predictions of increasing costs and lives lost due to a changing climate are far from certain, and the premise that Texas can somehow prevent the climate from changing, let alone prevent severe weather, is ludicrous when confronted with empirical climate science and measurements.

To be clear, the climate is changing. It always has and always will. When confronted with climate scare tactics advocating for policies that will significantly increase taxes and energy costs, the question to ask is how anyone can justify such policies once they recognize the lack of materiality of domestic manmade emissions, the climate resilience that abundant energy provides, and the human cost of depriving people of affordable energy.

Regarding materiality, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) data shows that eliminating, let alone reducing, emissions from the U.S. will contribute little to nothing to prevent the supposed catastrophic consequences projected in the open letter you received. For example, according to the [MAGICC6 model](#) cited in many IPCC reports, if the *entire U.S.* were to eliminate all GHG emissions from electricity production in 2020 (a clearly impossible task), [the predicted reduction in atmospheric CO₂ in 2050 would be 0.9%](#), and the predicted change in global temperature would be a mere 0.025°C, or 0.045°F. Of course, the Texas role in that already tiny fraction is much smaller.



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But the flaws of the letter do not end with the fact that their proposals are “all pain, no gain.” The predictions that higher temperatures will result in more “early deaths” and “lost labor hours” which are the [source of most of the economic costs](#) in the Climate Assessment and other government reports, are based on estimates of the effects of sudden heat waves and [do not properly account for adaptation](#) to long-term changes in temperature. Regarding severe weather events like Hurricane Harvey, it is flawed to draw the conclusion that manmade emissions made a bad storm worse, given that there has been no statistically significant increase in storm frequency or intensity over the past century. In fact, Houston’s ongoing ability to recover from Harvey is not just a testament to the enduring strength of community, but also to the climate resilience we have achieved thanks to the abundant fossil energy resources that kept the lights on, air conditioners running, and hospitals open — and allowed first responders and volunteers to drive, fly, and boat to Houston and all of the Coastal Bend.

Even if one accepted the flawed premises espoused by the open letter you received, spending billions of dollars in Texas to affect a miniscule change in temperatures is not sound policy. Renewable energy sources have already received [billions of dollars in subsidies from both federal tax credits and Chapter 312 and 313 tax abatements](#), which have distorted the Texas electricity market and undermined the market forces that would otherwise preserve existing dispatchable resources and attract new investments in natural gas fired generation. As a result, we now face reserve margins at record lows with more exposure to the intermittency of renewables than ever.

We are not condemning renewable energy—each energy source has its advantages and disadvantages—but we need policies that promote open and competitive energy markets, not policies where government favors one energy source over another, especially when they distort otherwise well-functioning markets. The best outcomes, both economically and environmentally, will always result from Texans participating in the energy markets with minimal government interference. Texas has shown itself to be a leader in all these areas. Over the past 15 years, Texas has [increased its electricity consumption by 25%](#), [doubled its GDP](#), and [tripled its crude oil production](#), all while improving its air quality.

Policymakers should never ignore the need to prepare for or recover from severe weather, but let’s focus on what we can control, be vigilant to consider measurable costs, and insist on measurable benefits so that we wisely use our limited resources and avoid unintended consequences. We stand ready to provide additional background on these matters and would be happy to meet with you or your team at any time to discuss how Texas can continue to lead the world toward a more secure and prosperous energy future.



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We are also aware that a group of respected climate scientists responded to the aforementioned letter and extended an offer to meet with you and the authors of that letter. We concur with the points made by those scientists in their letter and in [their publication](#), and we highly recommend their proposed interchange of ideas because the scientific method demands that these issues be continually debated. Despite the popular rhetoric of the time, it is fundamentally unscientific to say that the extent of mankind's impact on climate is "settled." And the even more far-fetched premise that Texas can somehow move the needle to prevent severe weather warrants a serious scientific debate in an open forum untainted by media, commercial, or academic bias.

Sincerely,

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