

Opinion

Letter: Candidates must address realities of climate change

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Measured on a global scale, 15 of the 16 warmest years have occurred since 2000. 2015 was the hottest on record – by a considerable margin. The U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris came to a global agreement among representatives of 195 nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming. So why are the Republican debates silent on an issue that will be a major issue to the next president?

Their economic argument on the campaign trail is that any change away from oil and coal to achieve a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions would necessarily involve big economic sacrifices. Sen. Marco Rubio echoed the party standard when he stated that when it comes to global warming, he was “not going to destroy our economy the way the left-wing government we are under now wants to do.” The reality is that we are well on the way with current policies.

Two examples highlight how recent policy changes are working. Renewable energy production in the United States started its rapid rise with tax incentives from the 2009 economic stimulus package. Since then, the cost of electricity generation using wind power fell 61 percent (solar power fell 82 percent) making renewable energy comparable in cost to fossil fuels. In 2012, the CAFE standard was introduced to bring the automotive industry’s corporate average fuel economy up from an average of 29.7 mpg to 54.5 mpg by 2025.

Ignoring the results of climate science research will not alter the reality of climate change. Greater lifestyle changes were needed to move society from candles to electric light, or horses to automobiles, than the lifestyle change needed today to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The missing debate in this country should be how we move from subsidizing the old fossil fuel industry and supporting the new energy sources of the 21st century.

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