

New climate change report likely to be ignored to death

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The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officially confirmed last week that 2016 was the Earth's hottest year on record, surpassing 2015, which surpassed 2014. The NOAA had reported this unofficially back in January. What made last week's announcement noteworthy is that the NOAA is now part of the administration of President Donald Trump, who has famously called global warming a "hoax."

Climate change denial is getting a little tricky for the president and his fellow Republicans. Politico reported last week that some business groups, including those allied with Charles and David Koch's powerful interests, are pushing back against the aggressive efforts of Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt to deny human-induced [climate change](#).

These groups would rather not argue against the scientific consensus that man-made global warming is a growing threat. They want to roll back environmental regulations anyway without getting into debates that might hurt moderate Republicans. It's an amazingly cynical strategy: Don't argue the evidence or address the problem. Just ignore it.

The Trump administration has another chance this week to consider the choice between deny and ignore. Friday is the deadline for the heads of the 13 federal agencies that study various aspects of [climate](#) change to sign off on a draft of the Climate Science Special Report compiled by the scientists who work for their agencies. The report is part of the

quadrennial National Climate Assessment mandated by Congress in 1990.

The draft was posted on the private nonprofit Internet Archive in January at a time when scientists feared that Trump might halt all climate research. It came to light last week when The New York Times reported that some government scientists were still concerned about potential Trump administration censorship.

The 673-page report largely reflects findings of hundreds, if not thousands, of previous studies of climate change, including those of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. This is not surprising: Good science must be replicable.

This report concludes that "it is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century. For the warming over the last century, there is no convincing alternative explanation supported by the extent of the observational evidence."

Scientists don't throw terms like "extremely likely" around casually. It means a 95 percent to 100 percent probability. And yet Pruitt, Trump's chief environmental official, scoffs at the concept that carbon dioxide released by human activity is a primary cause of global warming.

The draft report ventures into the quickly evolving field of "attribution science," suggesting that there's a "very high level of confidence" that [global warming](#) is responsible for extreme temperatures and "high confidence" that it's responsible for extreme precipitation.

The scientific argument is over. It's silly to deny it. It's shameful to know it and ignore it.

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