

PRO/CON: Did Hurricane Harvey show the reality of climate change?

By Wayne Madsen and Whitt Flora, Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.12.17

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In this aerial photo, a neighborhood near Addicks Reservoir is flooded by rain from Tropical Storm Harvey on August 29, 2017, in Houston, Texas. Harvey set a record for rainfall from a tropical system in the continental U.S., dropping 51.88 inches just outside Houston, an eighth of an inch behind the U.S. record set in Hawaii in 1950. Parts of Houston may be flooded for another month. Photo by: AP Photo/David J. Phillip

PRO: Yes, Harvey shows climate change is real

The real scientists, not the ones paid by the fossil fuel industry, have been proven correct.

The sea and air temperatures are rising. That's been brought about by the constant production of environmentally destructive greenhouse gases, which trap heat and warm the earth. This has ensured that what were called "500-year storms" are now happening every couple of years.

Hurricane Harvey heavily flooded parts of Texas that were considered safe from it. Interstate highways were turned into raging rivers. The second floors of many homes and buildings were reached by floodwaters.

But the historic flooding of Texas isn't a one-off event. As Texas accounted for the damage caused by Harvey, South Asia saw 1,200 deaths and millions of people made homeless. Unusually powerful monsoon rains left cities in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan under water.

In July, devastating rains flooded subway stations and turned streets into lakes in Istanbul, Turkey.

There's no doubt: With drastic climate change, the world is experiencing historic storms more often.

Hurricane Katrina did to New Orleans and southern Louisiana in 2005 what Harvey did to Houston this year. The impact will be long-lasting.

Hurricane Rita followed Katrina in 2005 and its strong winds hit Houston. The Texas city was well-prepared for the event, but could have never foreseen the floods brought by Harvey.

Superstorm Sandy in 2012 reminded New York City that it was not protected from the effects of climate change. Flooded subways in Manhattan weren't images from a disaster movie — they were real.

Demands for assistance from such federal government groups as the National Flood Insurance Program reached new levels.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration studies the weather. It's counted an average of 15 major Atlantic storms each year from 1995 to 2012, an increase from years past. The increase was blamed on warming oceans, resulting from our warming atmosphere.

Ice formations in Antarctica and the Arctic have collapsed at the same time. It will cause coastal flooding and change sea currents.

The collapse of underwater ecosystems is already having awful results for all animals in the undersea food chain. Eventually, the top of that food chain, humankind, will suffer without these sea creatures to eat.

Miami streets now flood regardless if there is a storm or not. A Harvey-like storm striking Miami would permanently change the shorelines.

President Donald Trump says climate change is an idea made up by the Chinese.

Someday, the president's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, could be flooded by the rising waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Maybe then, he might understand that his belief in fake science is putting the world at risk.

Wayne Madsen is a writer whose columns have appeared in newspapers around the world.

CON: No, Hurricanes have plagued Texas for a long time

The journalists at East Coast news organizations — The New York Times, Washington Post, NBC, CNN — quickly made a judgment.

These news organizations proclaimed Hurricane Harvey a prime example of devastating climate change. At the time, heavy rains were still flooding a huge area of southeast Texas.

The news reporters received applause from former Vice President Al Gore and climate doomsayers across the country. But they were very wrong.

Hurricane Harvey is a horrible, extreme case of the weather that typically attacks Texas' Gulf Coast. But it has nothing to do with global climate change.

Some in the growing climate disaster industry claim that Harvey was directly caused by man-made climate change.

Senator Bernie Sanders, for example, said, "Is some of the intensity and the magnitude of this related to climate change? I think most scientists believe it is."

And he's been joined by countless others. They're making frenzied calls for more government action and saying climate change will make extreme storms more severe.

But for some historical background, consider what happened in 1900. The worst hurricane in American history roared into Galveston, Texas, destroying thousands of buildings and killing an estimated 6,000-12,000 people. Harvey, thus far, has accounted for less than 100 deaths.

University of Washington atmospheric scientist Cliff Mass said climate change did not cause Hurricane Harvey.

"You can't really pin global warming for something this extreme," Mass said.

William Happer is a former director of energy research of the U.S. Department of Energy. He is also skeptical of global warming as generally explained by mainstream media.

"Climate has been changing since the Earth was formed — some 4.5 billion years ago. Climate changes on every time scale — whether decades, centuries or millennia," he wrote earlier this year.

"The climate of Greenland was warm enough for farming around the year A.D. 1100 but by 1500 the Little Ice Age drove Norse settlers out. There is no opportunity for a hoax," he says, as climate change has been so well-documented over time.

Debate between skeptical thinkers like Happer and his agreeable fellow scientists doing research with money from the government will likely continue.

In the meantime, tens of thousands of Texans are homeless, hungry, and distressed.

A native of El Paso, Texas, Whitt Flora is an independent journalist. He has written about government affairs for The Columbus Dispatch and Aviation Week & Space Technology magazine.

Quiz

- 1 Read the paragraph from the CON article.

"The climate of Greenland was warm enough for farming around the year A.D. 1100 but by 1500 the Little Ice Age drove Norse settlers out. There is no opportunity for a hoax," he says, as climate change has been so well-documented over time.

WHY does the author use the word "hoax"?

- (A) to indicate that some climate science might be intentionally inaccurate
- (B) to show that consensus exists about the impact of global warming
- (C) to demonstrate that there have been many proven fake reports about climate change
- (D) to suggest that the government should consider only climate change that can be proven in the historical record

- 2 Read the sentence from the CON article.

Debate between skeptical thinkers like Happer and his agreeable fellow scientists doing research with money from the government will likely continue.

Which two words would BEST replace "skeptical" and "agreeable" in the sentence above?

- (A) unconvinced; unwilling
- (B) certain; unsure
- (C) doubtful; accepting
- (D) devoted; convinced

- 3 Which of the following pieces of evidence is MOST relevant to the PRO article's argument?

- (A) Hurricane Harvey heavily flooded parts of Texas that were considered safe from it.
- (B) Superstorm Sandy in 2012 reminded New York City that it was not protected from the effects of climate change.
- (C) It's counted an average of 15 major Atlantic storms each year from 1995 to 2012, an increase from years past.
- (D) Someday, the president's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, could be flooded by the rising waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

- 4 In the CON article, HOW does William Happer justify extreme weather such as Hurricane Harvey?
- (A) He argues that we do not have adequate evidence to prove that climate change exists.
 - (B) He suggests that dramatic climate changes have occurred throughout history.
 - (C) He indicates that modern storms do not fit the definition of climate change presented by the media.
 - (D) He shows evidence to prove that climate change is directly impacted by human activity.