

## The Chronicle by Alice Loyd

### CLIMATE

**Climate action continues.** “As the federal government abdicates its role on this important issue, it is critical for states to fill the void,” said Virginia’s Governor Terry McAuliffe as he issued an executive order on May 16, 2017, instructing officials to begin crafting regulations to “abate, control, or limit” emissions from power plants in the state and increase renewable energy investment.” [Associated Press](#) California’s Governor Jerry Brown and New York’s Governor Andrew Cuomo issued a joint statement promising to continue to act on climate “with or without Washington.” [The Hill](#) Nearly half of the largest U.S. corporations have set their own targets for emissions reductions, even as the Trump administration retreats from environmental commitments. [NYTimes](#) Reductions in carbon emissions by [India](#) and [China](#) will eclipse any rise in US emissions as a result of Donald Trump’s efforts to boost the coal industry, according to a new analysis. [IndependentUK](#) Both of these nations are on track to meet their targets under the Paris agreement ahead of schedule. [Inside Climate News](#) Even if Trump decides to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, announced Maroš Šefčovič, Vice President of the European Commission and the chief energy policymaker for the European Union, “We are ready to continue to provide the leadership on climate change.” He added, “We are going to clearly pursue our goals in Europe, but we also want to continue our strong role in helping, especially in the developing world.” [Time](#)

**Those with eyes see the necessity for action.** In Antarctica miles of ice are collapsing into the seas. Alarmed by the warning signs that parts of the West Antarctic ice sheet are becoming unstable, American and British scientific agencies are joining forces to get better measurements in the main trouble spots. They are observing the acceleration of vast ice sheets that are flowing downhill, seemingly in slow motion—mountains funneling the ice into glaciers, and ice flowing from the land into the sea, forming floating ice shelves. [NY Times](#) A new branch has split off the widening crack in the Larsen Ice Shelf in another sign of the ice’s impending breakoff. The rift in the Larsen Ice Shelf along the east coast of the Antarctic Peninsula is now about 111 miles long. It grew by 17 miles between December and January of this year, and only 12 additional miles of ice remain attaching the calving ice to the larger shelf. [USA Today](#) The Great Barrier Reef is probably doomed no matter what, reports a new study showing even slight amounts of global warming will devastate Australia and destroy its famous reef. [The Atlantic](#) Pre-monsoon heat this year began earlier than normal, with New Delhi recording its hottest March in seven years. Heat waves typically set in across India in April and last through June, when the cooling monsoon rains arrive. [Climate Central](#) This year’s floods in Peru have been the worst in living memory. Ten times the usual amount of rain has fallen on Peru’s coast, swelling rivers, causing widespread flooding, and triggering huge landslides which tore through shanty towns. [The Guardian](#) The glaciers in Montana’s Glacier National Park are rapidly disappearing. Some have been reduced by as much as 85 percent over the past 50 years; the average loss is 39 percent. [NPR](#)

**There are some US Republicans working for climate action.** Bob Inglis—a former Congressman from South Carolina—has become a spokesperson of sorts for “the eco-right,” a group of think tanks, activists and politicians making the case for a free-market approach to environmentalism grounded in conservative values. He now serves as the Executive Director of RepublicEn. [The Atlantic](#) In March 2017 seventeen Republican lawmakers, including Elise Stefanik of New York, Carlos Curbelo of Florida, Mark Sanford of South Carolina, Mia Love of Utah, Don Bacon of Nebraska, and Ryan Costello of Pennsylvania, introduced a resolution that urges the House of Representatives to “address the causes and effects” of climate change. [rt.com](#) A group of prominent conservative Republicans—including former Secretary of State James Baker III, former Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, former Secretary of State George Shultz, and former Walmart Chairman Rob Walton—met with key members of the Trump administration in February 2017 to propose a carbon tax. They believe an economy-wide tax on carbon dioxide could enable the United States to achieve its international emissions targets with better economic outcomes than under a purely regulatory approach. [NY Times](#) And many of Trump’s most influential policy advisers are urging him to keep the United States in the Paris climate accord, including his daughter Ivanka and son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Supporting “remain” are Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson and White House climate policy adviser, George David Banks—not to mention US-based Exxon-Mobil and European oil companies Royal Dutch Shell and BP, both with significant investments in the United States. [NY Times](#)

## ENERGY

**The success of clean energy sources and applications shows the turn from fossil fuels is already happening.** US electricity generation capacity from wind power provided more megawatts in the first quarter of 2017 than in the first three quarters of 2016 combined. Wind provided 5.6 percent of all electricity produced in 2016, an amount of generation that has more than doubled since 2010. [insideclimatenews](#) In April 2017 Denmark offshore wind giant Dong Energy won the rights to build two new wind farms in the German North Sea, and it will not need government subsidies to justify the investment. The move represents a major milestone for the offshore wind industry, which in the past has required support from European governments. [NY Times](#) Saudi Arabia will develop 30 solar and wind projects over the next 10 years as part of the kingdom’s \$50 billion program to boost power generation and cut its oil consumption. The world’s biggest exporter of crude oil will produce 10 percent of its power from renewables by 2023. [Bloomberg](#) In a final sign of how the energy industry’s future is being reimagined, electric-car maker Tesla passed General Motors in April 2017 as America’s most valuable auto company. [CNBC](#) Tesla has plans to move into the heavy vehicle market, and the first glimpse of the new Tesla Semi is due this fall. [Quartz](#)

**New sources of energy and new ways to store it are rapidly being developed.** Large-scale compressed air storage, which already exists in Germany and the United States, utilizes underground chambers in salt formations that release the stored air through a gas turbine that generates electricity. Without a system to store the heat that was produced during the air compression stage, however, much of the energy is lost. Scientists are experimenting with using

a separate cavern filled with crushed rock as an intermediate chamber on the way to the main cavern. The process of compressing air heats it up, the hot compressed air heats up the rock as it passes through, the rock retains a large proportion of the heat, and when the air subsequently returns from the main storage vault it is reheated by the rock and then expanded through the turbine generating electricity. This technology could raise the efficiency of the cave storage system to the point that 70-80% of the compressed air would be used for energy, and wherever underground sites exist, the method would prove more economical than battery storage. [ScienceDaily](#) Discovering an economical way to break down lignin, the part of plant cell walls that provides structure and protection from bacterial and insect attacks, may ultimately make biofuels price competitive with petroleum. At the present time in the process of converting plant matter to fuel, lignin is the residue and it is either left unused in piles as a waste product or, when large amounts are available such as in pulp and paper manufacture, is burned to produce onsite electricity. If commercial products, such as renewable plastics, fabrics, nylon and adhesives, could be made from lignin, the financial benefit of these would offset the higher cost of biofuel manufacture. The hitch has been lack of a cheap way to break down lignin, and Sandia National Laboratories believe their success in decoding the structure and behavior of LigM, an enzyme that breaks down molecules derived from lignin, may be the needed breakthrough. [ScienceDaily](#)

**These advances are less likely to continue as the US Department of Energy changes its objectives.** The Trump administration wants to cut the renewable and energy efficiency program by nearly 70%, according to a draft agency budget document. Congress is probably not going to grant such deep cuts, but the lower the starting point, the lower the ultimate numbers are likely to end up. [Axios](#) Republican Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa raised concerns over the upcoming Department of Energy grid study in a letter sent to Secretary Rick Perry May 17, 2017. Grassley expressed concern that the study “appears to pre-determine that variable, renewable sources such as wind have undermined grid reliability.” Grassley said 36 percent of energy in Iowa comes from wind, cited utility rates as the ninth-lowest in the nation, and instructed Perry that “any study reviewing the impacts of wind energy on grid reliability and security should look closely at Iowa’s utility operations as evidence of its success.” [Reuters](#) Four major solar and wind industry groups pushed back on the grid study as well. On May 16, 2017, the American Council on Renewable Energy, American Wind Energy Association, Solar Energy Industries Association and Advanced Energy Economy expressed concern at being shut out of the review process and presented analyses showing that renewables enhance grid reliability and save money. [The Hill](#) Secretary Rick Perry may consider himself in a tight spot regarding wind energy, since under his leadership as governor, Texas became the number one producer of wind energy in the United States. The state produces more wind energy than the next three states combined. In fact, if it were its own country, Texas would, by the end of 2017, be the fourth-largest largest wind-producing country in the world. Dale Ross, Mayor of Georgetown and a staunch Republican who attended President Trump’s inauguration, says former Texas Governor Rick Perry deserves the credit: “I truly believe he was a visionary.” Jay Root, reporter for *The Texas Tribune*, says “I don’t think anyone would call Rick Perry an environmentalist, including Rick Perry. . . . But the guy knows how to sniff out a dollar.

Here's a guy from West Texas who saw that you can make money off of the wind blowing. Like, that's a no brainer." A no-brainer unless you're a Tea Party conservative. Perry faces challenges at the national level that will make it much harder for him to expand what he did in Texas. [NPR](#)

## **CIVIL LIBERTY**

At the end of March, representatives of the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights registered a complaint with the US Department of State about a rash of US legislation "incompatible with US obligations under international human rights law." The two special rapporteurs responsible for compiling reports and presenting them to the UN agency listed specific pieces of legislation which they said were "criminalizing peaceful protests" and threatening "to jeopardize one of the United States' constitutional pillars: free speech." [The Globe and Mail](#) The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said more than 30 separate anti-protest bills have been introduced since November 8, 2016, in "an unprecedented level of hostility towards protesters in the 21st century. And many of these bills attack the right to speak out precisely where the supreme court has historically held it to be the most robust: in public parks, streets and sidewalks." [The Guardian](#) North Dakota lawmakers have considered bills to heavily penalize protest actions against the Dakota Access Pipeline, and in May Governor Mary Fallin of Oklahoma signed a bill that would levy steep fines or prison time against people convicted of trespassing at a critical infrastructure facility to impede operations in that state. Facilities include pipelines, refineries, chemical plants, railways, and other industrial sites. Under the new law individuals will face a felony and a minimum \$10,000 fine if a court determines they entered property intending to damage, vandalize, deface, "impede or inhibit operations of the facility." Should the trespasser actually succeed in "tampering" with the infrastructure, they face a \$100,000 fine or 10 years of imprisonment. Attorney Doug Parr, who has represented numerous environmental activists in Oklahoma protest cases, noted that under the new trespassing law a violation as minor as spray-painting a message on an oil facility could plausibly lead to \$100,000 in fines if a court determined it was "defacing equipment." He said the law amplifies risks for groups that organize protest actions who can't always account for the diversity of tactics used by attendees. A coalition of Native American and environmental activists have said they plan to block the proposed Diamond Pipeline, a \$900 million project that will carry crude oil from the Cushing refinery hub toward Tennessee. [The Intercept](#)

On February 24, 2017, the White House barred news outlets including CNN, *The New York Times*, Politico and *The Los Angeles Times* from attending an off-camera press briefing held by spokesman Sean Spicer. CNN's Sara Murray commented on the air, "What the White House was doing was handpicking the outlets they wanted in for this briefing. So *Breitbart*, the *Washington Times*, the One America News Network—news outlets that maybe the White House feels are more favorable—were all allowed in." [Washington Post](#) A number of major news organizations were also let in to cover the informal briefing, often called a "gaggle." That group included ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, Reuters, Bloomberg, *The Wall Street Journal* and McClatchy. *The Hill*, Politico, *BuzzFeed*, *The Daily Mail*, BBC, and the *New York Daily News* were among the other news organizations not permitted to attend. Reporters from The Associated Press and *Time* magazine were allowed into the gaggle but refused to attend. That organization's communications arm

tweeted, “AP believes the public should have as much access to the president as possible,”. *The Wall Street Journal* said, “Had we known at the time, we would not have participated and we will not participate in such closed briefings in the future.” The press corps maintains an “in-house pool” of twenty-one reporters who cover events on the White House grounds when there is not enough space for the press group. There is also a smaller pool that travels with the president to events in Washington, DC. On February 24<sup>th</sup> the White House apparently decided to use different criteria in forming the group that could attend. A uniformed Secret Service officer told excluded reporters to leave the hallway outside the meeting. [The Hill](#)

**After this incident, instead of banishing unfavored news outlets, Spicer has been conspicuously picking who gets to ask questions:** These include *The Daily Signal*, published by the Heritage Foundation; *Breitbart News*, which White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon used to run; the London *Daily Mail*, which was banned as a source by Wikipedia for its “reputation for poor fact-checking and sensationalism”; and the *Gateway Pundit*, the “aggressively incorrect hate site,” Fox News, and Townhall.com. Katie Pavlich of Fox News is called on frequently to ask questions such as “Is President Trump planning to ask the Senate to expedite legislation allowing for the swift firing of bad VA employees?” That one got a “That’s a great question!” response from Spicer. [Washington Spectator](#)

Free speech got a boost from former President George W. Bush following a problematic February White House press conference. He told reporters, “I consider the media to be indispensable to democracy, that we need an independent media to hold people like me to account.” [USA Today](#) Beware, though, of exercising what you might think is a right to free speech if you ever get threatened with arrest in Louisiana. Resisting arrest there can be classified as a hate crime, punishable by up to 10 years in prison. In fact, if someone is wrongly arrested and resists that wrongful arrest, instead of simply being charged with the misdemeanor of resisting arrest, that person can be charged with a felony hate crime against police. It doesn’t matter if they actually hate police or not. St. Martinville Police Chief Calder Hebert said he is already enforcing the law. “Resisting an officer or battery of a police officer was just that charge, simply. But now, (Louisiana) Governor Edwards, in the legislation, made it a hate crime now.” [KATV News](#)

The Louisiana law went into effect prior to Trump’s inauguration, but on February 9, 2017, Trump issued an executive order in the same spirit. Entitled “Presidential Executive Order on Preventing Violence against Federal, State, Tribal, and Local Law Enforcement Officers,” the order promises to “define new Federal crimes, and increase penalties for existing Federal crimes, in order to prevent violence against Federal, State, tribal, and local law enforcement officers.” [The Guardian](#)

In another well-publicized incident, on May 10, 2017, Daniel Ralph Heyman, a Public News Service journalist since 2009, was arrested for asking a question of US Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price during a visit to West Virginia. US Capitol police said Heyman was yelling questions, tried to breach Secret Service security, and had to be removed from a hallway. Heyman said he was arrested after asking repeatedly whether domestic violence

would be considered a preexisting condition under the proposed healthcare overhaul. He has been a journalist for three decades. He said he believed he was doing nothing wrong. The ACLU issued a statement emphasizing the setting: “not in a closed meeting or the inside of a working office, but in the hallways of a government building,” and called the arrest “a blatant attempt to chill an independent, free press. The charges against him are outrageous, and they must be dropped immediately.” [The Guardian](#)