

# 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 off by the fossil fuel industry, have been proven correct.

Rising atmospheric and sea temperatures have been brought about by the constant production of environmentally destructive, heat-trapping greenhouse gases. This has ensured that what were called “500-year storms” are now happening every couple of years.

Hurricane Harvey saw areas of Texas never prone to flooding deluged with up to 50 inches of rain. Interstate highways were turned into raging rivers. The second floors of many homes and apartment buildings were reached by floodwaters.

But the historic flooding of Texas isn't a one-off event. As Texas counted the dead and tallied up the billions of dollars in 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, unprecedented rains flooded subway stations and turned streets into lakes in Istanbul, one of Europe's biggest cities.

There's no doubt about it: 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 and its surrounding metro area this year, and the impact will be long-lasting.

Hurricane Rita followed Katrina in 2005 and its strong winds hit Houston, serving as a harsh wake-up call. The Texas city was well-prepared for the event, but could have never foreseen the floods wrought by Harvey.

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

The Carolinas were continuing to rebuild from 2016's Hurricane Matthew unprecedented flooding when Harvey struck Texas.

Demands for assistance from such federal groups as the National Flood Insurance Program reached new levels. It put new stresses on the flood relief fund, which was already in debt.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has counted an average of 15 named Atlantic storms each year from 1995 to 2012, an increase from years past. The frequency of the storms was directly blamed on warming oceans, resulting from our warming atmosphere.

Ice formations in Antarctica and the Arctic have collapsed at the same time. It will have irreversible effects on coastal flooding, sea currents, and the abundance of marine life.

The collapse of marine ecosystems is already having disastrous results for species up and down the marine food chain. Eventually, the top of that food chain, humankind, will suffer from oceans without sustaining food resources.

With Miami streets now flooding during non-storm-related tides, a Harvey-like storm striking Miami would permanently change the shorelines.

President Donald Trump calls climate change a "hoax" 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 come to his senses about global climate change and understand that his reliance on fake science is putting the world at risk.

*Wayne Madsen is a progressive writer whose columns have appeared in*

## CON: No, hurricanes have plagued Texas for a long time

The writers and talkers at elite East Coast media outlets — The New York Times, Washington Post, NBC, CNN and their many associates — wasted no time in rushing to judgment.

Heavy rains were still flooding a huge area of southeast Texas when the media proclaimed Hurricane Harvey a prime example of devastating climate change.

They received standing applause from Al Gore and his group of federally funded climate doomsayers across the country. But they were jarringly wrong.

Hurricane Harvey is a horrible, extreme case of the weather that typically ravages 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, or, at the very least, was made significantly worse by it.

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 making frenzied calls for more government action and saying climate change will make extreme storms more severe.

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

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, a former director of energy research for the U.S. Department of Energy, is also highly 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," he wrote in an opinion piece earlier this year. "Climate changes on every time scale — whether decades, centuries or millennia.

"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, since climate change is so well documented by historical and geophysical records."

Debate between skeptical academics like Happer and his undoubting colleagues doing research with money from the government will likely continue.

In the meantime, tens of thousands of Texans are homeless, hungry and quite possibly shell-shocked.

*A native of El Paso, Texas, Whitt Flora is an independent journalist. He covered the White House for The Columbus Dispatch and wrote for Aviation Week & Space Technology magazine.*

## Quiz

1 Read the list of phrases from the CON article.

1. *rushing to judgment*
2. *climate doomsayers*
3. *growing climate disaster industry*
4. *undoubting colleagues*

HOW do these phrases contribute to the TONE of the article?

- (A) They create an open and affirming tone.
- (B) They show a respectful and measured tone.
- (C) They demonstrate a skeptical and unbelieving tone.
- (D) They suggest a sincere and inquisitive tone.

2 Read the following sentence from the PRO article.

*In July, unprecedented rains flooded subway stations and turned streets into lakes in Istanbul, one of Europe's biggest cities.*

Which words from the article help explain what "unprecedented" means?

- (A) historic; drastic
- (B) long-lasting; deluged
- (C) stresses; frequency
- (D) collapsed; irreversible

3 Which aspect of the PRO author's argument is MOST important in the PRO article as a whole?

- (A) the widespread dispersion of major storm systems around the world during the past decade
- (B) the breakdown of Arctic ice formations and the increased risk of coastal flooding during non-storm situations
- (C) the unlikely devastation wrought by Hurricane Harvey in parts of Texas that were not thought to be vulnerable to flooding
- (D) the increased frequency of major storms that has coincided with rising greenhouse gas emissions

Read the following claim from the CON article.

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

Adding which of the following pieces of evidence would BEST support the claim above?

- (A) The mainstream media tends to simplify the complex, scientific nature of global climate change.
- (B) Global warming has been scientifically linked to the increased emission of greenhouse gases by human beings.
- (C) It is impossible to definitively prove that increased storm activity is directly linked to climate change.
- (D) Many scientists disagree with Happer's assessment and argue instead that the dominant media narrative is correct.