

Florida provides perfect backdrop for GOP to offer serious climate action | Editorial

By PALM BEACH POST EDITORIAL BOARD
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With the Republican National Committee holding its winter meeting in South Florida at President Trump's National Doral resort, ground zero for climate change in the state, the nation's top Republican leaders have an opportunity to at least begin to change attitudes toward climate action. (Alex Sanz/AP)

While meeting in South Florida, ground zero for climate change in the state, top Republican leaders have an opportunity to at least begin to change attitudes toward climate action.

There is good reason for the [Republican National Committee](#) (RNC) to bring its winter meeting to President Donald Trump's Trump National Doral Golf Club this week.

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The Sunshine State, where President Donald Trump barely eked out a win in 2016, is still the biggest swing state on the Electoral College block with 29 votes. It is essential to a repeat victory in 2020. And with Republicans in control of both chambers of the state legislature — as well as the governor's office, and two other Florida Cabinet seats — GOP leaders rightfully feel like this is their home turf.

It would nice if national Republican leaders started treating it that way. Not with carefully scripted Trump rallies or promises of selective, small-scale funding. They should make it known that they understand, in no uncertain terms, that Florida — with its 1,200-plus miles of valuable coastline — is ground zero for the growing and costly threat of sea-level rise from a warming climate. That because of what's

happening in this politically crucial state, the time for debate is over. This is the time for action, and the money to back it up.

Possibly, the most politically inane thing this consummate political organization could do would be to bring a three-day confab to South Florida, which suffers from sunny day flooding and saltwater intrusion, and offer up nothing with regard to climate solutions.

From the [Florida Keys](#) to Fort Walton Beach, Floridians — Republicans not excepted — care about climate change and the billions of dollars in related costs we face in coming years. According to a [statewide survey](#) released by Florida Atlantic University last fall, more than two-thirds of Floridians say that climate change has them concerned about the well-being of future generations in Florida and do not feel government is doing enough to address the impacts. Nearly six in 10 (57%) of Florida Republicans support government action to address climate change, according to a [Yale University-George Mason University-Climate Nexus poll](#) taken in June.

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“Republicans have figured out that if you get caught crossways on the environment, you could very well lose an election. That’s how important the issue is to Floridians of all stripes,” Susan MacManus, a former political science professor at the University of South Florida, told the AP.

A rising tide of concern is undeniable across the state — starting in South Florida, where four county governments, including Palm Beach County, formed to create the state’s [climate change compact](#) more than a decade ago. [Municipal governments](#) and business groups are forming their own collaborations. Other regions of the state are mimicking South Florida’s model — like the [Tampa Bay Regional Resiliency Coalition](#).

How pointed is the issue here? While the RNC is meeting in Doral, the [University of Miami](#) is hosting a three-day symposium about the growing link between climate change and trend of bigger, stronger, wetter Atlantic hurricanes — like Irma, Michael and Dorian. That follows an [Everglades advocates](#) meeting last week on Captiva Island to discuss resiliency for the fabled “River of Grass” in the face of a changing climate.

But Florida Republicans know all of this. Gov. Ron DeSantis has opened the door in state government to climate talk and action. A door that had been closed for nearly a decade under his predecessor, Rick Scott — who now, as a U.S. senator, has done a modest about-face, saying that he believes “climate change is real and requires real solutions.” It is worth noting, however, that [DeSantis didn’t mention climate change](#) even once during his State of the State address on Tuesday.

But while Republican Florida congressmen like Panhandle Rep. Matt Gaetz and the retiring Rep. Francis Rooney are finally speaking up in Washington, the Trump White House has been dispiriting on the topic. From leaving the historic Paris Climate Agreement to gutting environmental regulations to discouraging federal agencies from prioritizing preparation for climate change, Florida voters view this

administration as adding fuel to the very global warming that so threatens the state.

Top Republican leaders meeting here this week have an opportunity to begin changing that perception by laying out a politically critical plan of action.

Yes, DeSantis has managed to wrangle \$200 million out of President Trump for Everglades restoration and millions more for Hurricane Michael recovery. But such targeted political fixes essentially apply tiny Band-Aids to a big, festering wound. They do nothing to address the underlying issue of climate change and the mounting costs of inaction.

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As state Sen. Tom Lee of Thonotossassa said at a Committee on Infrastructure and Security hearing last November, “We lost a decade.”

Floridians can't afford to lose any more time. They need to hear some real solutions. The RNC has picked the perfect spot to learn — quickly.

This editorial first appeared in The Palm Beach Post.

“The Invading Sea” is the opinion arm of the Florida Climate Reporting Network, a collaborative of news organizations across the state focusing on the threats posed by the warming climate.
