ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY 14.04.2017 | Manuela Mattheß

Nuggets in Trumpland

The US' new energy policy is harming the country and jeopardising global efforts to reduce global warming. Fatalism, however, is not an option

The cat's out the bag. After weeks of speculation over Donald Trump's climate and energy policy, his first steps aren't promising. The president has suspended the 'Clean Water Rule', rolled back limits on carbon emissions from power plants and overturned anti-corruption legislation forcing oil, gas and mining companies to disclose payments to foreign governments. He's also resumed construction of the controversial Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines. On 28 March, Trump unveiled a proposed budget that includes deep cuts to development aid and climate protection measures but which pumps up military spending. Now we've got a better idea of where he's headed.

With his Energy Independence Executive Order to reverse several climate rules, especially Obama's Clean Power Plan, Trump is seeking to rewrite US energy and climate policy. The order directs the Environmental Protection Agency to dismantle his predecessor's climate protection plan, especially in terms of reducing fossil-fuel plant emissions and developing a new energy concept. Trump's executive action calls for a review of limits to dangerous methane emissions and stops the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) from requiring federal agencies to prepare environmental assessments and environmental impact statements for their projects.

Trump's Executive Order to reverse several climate rules steers the USA full throttle back towards the past

Even if the new president's executive order is not automatically implemented, it sets a course that is problematic for many reasons. First of all, it steers the USA full throttle back towards the past. The Trump administration should understand that promising to create new coal jobs as a means of strengthening the economy is a preposterous idea. Global demand for coal is vanishing: Coal can barely keep up with renewable energies, whose costs are dropping rapidly. In the USA, the solar industry already

> employs four times as many people as the coal and gas sectors combine. Bringing back coal mining to create jobs in the rust belt is a non-starter. Putting "America First" in the energy sector makes a mockery of global efforts to protect the climate.

The USA will probably not pull out of the Paris climate agreement. But evoking an American "coal renaissance" jeopardises the stated goal of limiting global warming – not to an already risky 1.5 degrees higher than current levels, but rather to 2 degrees, which would put many cities on the Eastern Seaboard under water. A return to more would also cause the USA to fall short of its own emission-reduction targets.

Pulling the plug on finance

Trump's proposed changes to climate finance are equally worrying. In late January, a bill was introduced that would bar payments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Green Climate Fund. Passage of the bill would create massive spending gaps in climate funds and most severely impact the poorest, most vulnerable countries. These countries depend on financial assistance to adapt to the serious climate changes that are already happening. The proposed law would also make it much harder to reach the goals of the ground-breaking Paris Agreement of late 2015.

Trump's new executive order should not cause us to despair. We have to come up with appropriate responses, especially when it comes to global climate protection. As Germany's environment minister, Barbara Hendricks, correctly observed, it is not possible to simply roll back all the environmental progress that's been made over the last few years – from the triumph of renewable energies to successful multilateral negotiations for reducing greenhouse gases. Progressive politicians, NGOs and businesses need to rally together to ensure the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development come into force, and to support a sustainable, climate-friendly future instead of a hell-bent rush backwards.

Most likely, the United States will not be fighting for more climate protection in the next few years, but that shouldn't spell the end of international efforts to curb global warming. With the US pulling back, it's all the more important that countries like China and India, along with the European Union, keep their pledges to reduce emissions and even increase their climate funding. This of course also goes for

developing and emerging countries – within their financial means.

In climate protection stronger international cooperation is needed to oppose the current US administration.

The byword of the UNFCCC, which was created to stabilise greenhouse gas emissions, is 'adaptation'. It's hoped that municipalities and non-state, civil-society actors will also contribute to this process. In the USA, for example, California and a number of other states are seeking to more actively participate in discussions on international climate policy – partly to compensate for the fact that the federal government will no longer be involved. The other countries in the convention must also develop specific strategies for dealing with member states that remains at the negotiating table but are no longer interested in implementing the agreed objectives. We don't want a repeat of the disastrous 2009 climate negotiations in Copenhagen. The stronger integration of non-state actors in intergovernmental negotiating processes could have positive effects.

The Paris Agreement shows that multilateralism still works. In climate protection, as well as in other policy areas, stronger international cooperation is needed to oppose the current US administration. Specific strategies for ambitious cross-border climate policies can defy those who want to dwell in the past – and advance global climate protection.



Manuela Mattheß
Berlin

Manuela Mattheß is currently working as a policy officer on international climate and energy policies for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. She previously worked for the foundation as a project assistant in Senegal and as a policy officer in the department for Central and Eastern Europe in Berlin.