

Republican Party US

Young Republicans push party to drop climate change scepticism

Strategists warn that Trump's anti-green rhetoric is alienating younger conservatives



Participants attending a press conference hold up a banner in favour of the 'Green New Deal' at the US Capitol in Washington on March 26

Kiran Stacey and Courtney Weaver in Washington YESTERDAY

Senior Republicans are urging Donald Trump to curb his rhetoric on [climate change](#) ahead of next year's election, as evidence emerges that young Republican voters are increasingly persuaded by the science behind climate change.

Republicans in Congress and party strategists have told the White House that Mr Trump risks losing votes if he returns to his argument that climate change is a hoax promoted by China to undermine American manufacturing.

Francis Rooney, a Republican congressman from Florida, said he had brought up the issue of climate change many times with the White House.

"We've done some polling. Even in the very conservative area I represent, over 70 per cent of the people I represent think the government needs to do something about climate change," he said.

Carlos Curbelo, a former Republican congressman who co-founded the House of Representatives' climate solutions caucus in 2016, said: "For young Republicans this is an issue of science — not a cultural or ideological question which is unfortunately the case for Republicans of older generations."

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Polls suggest that the Republican leadership, which has spent much of the last few weeks campaigning against the Democrats' ["Green New Deal"](#), is out of touch with younger Republicans' opinions on this issue.

Gallup polls show that about a quarter of Republicans aged 18-34 say they worry a great deal about climate change — double the proportion of party supporters as a whole. A recent letter urging the party to prioritise clean energy and the environment [was signed](#) by 41 out of 50 state chairpeople of the College Republican group.

Evidence suggests that in coastal communities hit by recent tropical storms, such as the Florida district represented by Mr Rooney, opinion is changing particularly quickly.

In North Carolina, for example, 37 per cent of Republican voters believe global warming would “very likely” have a negative impact on the state’s coast in the next 50 years, according to [a poll](#) conducted last year by Elon University. That compares with just 13 per cent a year and a half earlier.

Several Republican groups have now commissioned further studies to examine the attitudes of younger right-leaning voters in more detail.

Rob Sisson, president of ConservAmerica, a group of green-minded Republicans, said: “The split has become more pronounced over the last decade. Young Republicans are asking why the party isn’t taking this issue more seriously.”

I recognise the obvious science of climate change. I didn’t come to Congress to argue with a thermometer

Matt Gaetz, Republican congressman

Danielle Butcher, chief operating officer of the American Conservation Coalition, a group of conservative millennial environmentalists, said: “This is going to end up costing the party votes — not necessarily with people who are involved with the party, but certainly with young people who lean conservative.”

Some Republicans in Congress are bringing their own pieces of legislation to compete with the Green New Deal, which they say will promote a more conservative response to climate change.

Last week Matt Gaetz, one of President Donald Trump’s most vocal allies in the House of Representatives, announced he was drafting a [“Green Real Deal”](#), which will promote using the free market to modernise the country’s energy infrastructure.

Mr Gaetz said: “One of the problems Republicans have with climate change is they assume if you accept the science of climate change, then you are [required] to embrace the left solution set.”

But he added: “I recognise the obvious science of climate change. I didn’t come to Congress to argue with a thermometer.”

Lamar Alexander, a Republican senator for Tennessee, is promoting what he calls a [“New Manhattan Project”](#) to promote clean energy sources. His plan focuses on technology such as

nuclear power, natural gas and carbon capture as a way to move away from more polluting fossil fuels.



Senator James Inhofe, a Republican from Oklahoma, shows off his tie featuring oil rigs as he arrives to vote on the Green New Deal on Capitol Hill in Washington on March 26 © Bloomberg

For the president, however, this shift in opinion poses more of a dilemma.

Mr Trump won the 2016 election in part by performing well in industrial states, where [he promised](#) to bring in policies such as reopening coal mines. One of his early moves after becoming president was to announce that the US would withdraw from the Paris climate agreement.

But some of his allies believe he can be persuaded to change his mind, especially if polling begins to show he could end up losing important states next year.

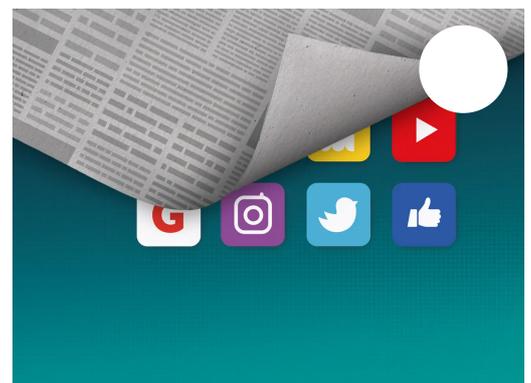
“Opinion is changing to the extent that you cannot win national elections without a credible platform on this issue,” said Mr Sisson.

One ally of Mr Trump said: “There are a lot of people working on turning the president around on this. I believe it can be done.”

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