

# Our view: America, pick your climate choices

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One way to deal with a problem is to pretend it doesn't exist. This approach has the virtue of relieving you from having to come up with a solution, spend money or make tough choices. The downside, of course, is that leaky faucets and other problems rarely solve themselves and, in fact, usually get worse if ignored.

## **OPPOSING VIEW:** [All pain, no gain](#)

Such is the case with climate change, a threat that too many members of Congress, most of them Republicans, have decided to manage by denying the science. That head-in-the-sand approach avoids messy discussions of higher energy prices, but it just got harder to justify.

Late last week, the nation's pre-eminent scientific advisory group, the [National Research Council](#) arm of the [National Academy of Sciences](#), issued a report called "[America's Climate Choices](#)." As scientific reports go, its key findings were straightforward and unequivocal: "Climate change is occurring, is very likely caused primarily by human activities, and poses significant risks to humans and the environment." Among those risks in the USA: more intense and frequent heat waves, threats to coastal communities from rising sea levels, and greater drying of the arid Southwest.

Coincidentally, [USA TODAY's Dan Vergano reported Monday](#), a statistics journal retracted a federally funded study that had become a touchstone among climate-change deniers. The retraction followed complaints of plagiarism and use of unreliable sources, such as Wikipedia.

Taken together, these developments ought to leave the deniers in the same position as the "birthers," who continue to challenge President Obama's American citizenship — a vocal minority that refuses to accept overwhelming evidence.

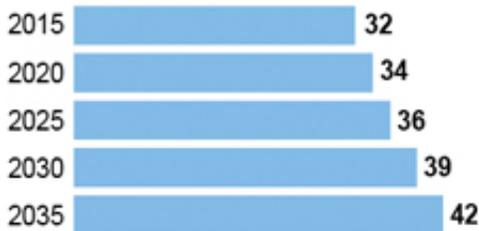
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The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top left, followed by the word "AutoPilot" in a large, bold, black font. To the right of "AutoPilot" is a blue airplane icon. Below the title is a smartphone displaying the app's interface, which includes a "USA TODAY Meeting" section with a date of "Sep 21, 2009", a flight status "A6 BNA to IAD Landed 09/21/2009 11:48 AM", and a weather forecast for "Washington (AD)" showing "73°" and "Partly Cloudy". There are also links to "View a Flickr gallery of Washington" and "Articles: Hotel Check in Hilton Hotels guests". To the right of the phone, the text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". Below this is the Hampton logo and the text "Presented by:". At the bottom right, a blue button contains the text "SEE HOW IT WORKS »".

### Greenhouse gases

Led by developing nations, worldwide energy-related carbon dioxide emissions are projected to increase nearly a third from 2015 to 2035.

CO2 emissions (in billions of metric tons)



Source: Energy Information Administration/ International Energy Outlook, 2010

By Veronica Salazar, USA TODAY

The Climate Choices report didn't generate big headlines because its conclusions aren't new; they are consistent with the scientific consensus about global warming. That consensus acknowledges some uncertainty in the extent to which climate change is the result of human activity, and how bad global warming will be if nothing is done.

Even so, as the report says, "uncertainty is not a reason for inaction," and the most effective national response to climate change would be to "substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

If the deniers want a more legitimate basis for resistance, it is this: Even bold and costly national U.S. actions to limit greenhouse gases will be ineffective unless developing nations also curb their emissions. It's hard to imagine China and India acting, however, if the U.S. doesn't lead.

The Climate Choices report, requested by Congress, suggests investing in clean-energy technology, looking for ways to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and —

most important — putting a price on carbon dioxide emissions. "Cap-and-trade," a complex but proven way to use market forces to reduce pollution, passed the House in 2009. Like health care reform, though, it has become so unpopular in GOP circles that at the first Republican presidential debate this month, former Minnesota governor [Tim Pawlenty](#) abjectly [apologized for once supporting the idea](#). "I've said I was wrong," Pawlenty groveled. "It was a mistake, and I'm sorry."

For now, his party's rejectionist stance is unrivaled among major political parties, including conservative ones, around the warming planet. The latest scientific report provides clarity that denial isn't just a river in Egypt. It paves a path to a future fraught with [melting ice caps](#), rising sea levels, shifting agricultural patterns, droughts and wildfires.

Leaky faucets, indeed.

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