



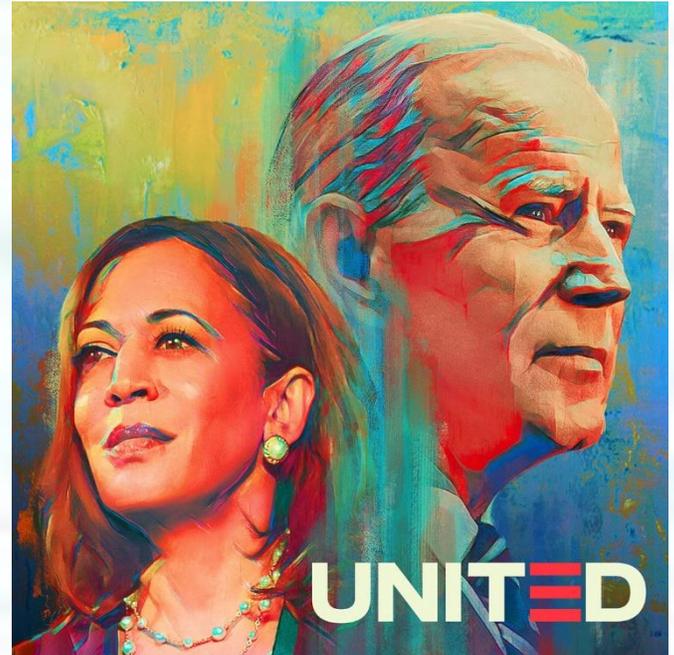
the weekly anthropocene



dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere

By Sam Matey, November 9, 2020

Victory. We won. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris will be the next President and Vice President of the United States. This is a historic, epic victory. (Thanks to @HillaryClinton for the graphic!). Granted, it's disappointing that the Democrats didn't do better in Congressional and state legislative elections, but it's still overwhelmingly excellent to get rid of Donald Trump, and the Democrats still have a chance at winning control of the Senate through two run-off elections in Georgia scheduled for January 5th. Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock winning would be hugely important in terms of denying noted recipient of coal magnate money Mitch McConnell the powers of Senate Majority Leader, and highly increasing the likelihood of passing



substantive climate legislation. However, President-elect Biden ran with the strongest climate platform in history, and there's a huge amount he can do on environmental issues for America and the world even if the Senate stays in Republican hands. With executive orders alone, Biden can (and has pledged to) rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement, stop the Keystone XL pipeline once and for all, restore the methane emission reduction regulations nonsensically overturned under Trump, reverse Trump's approval for logging in Tongass National Forest, get rid of the rest of the wide range of other deregulatory polluter giveaways, and move forward by banning fossil fuel extraction while encouraging safe renewable energy development on US public lands. That last, a policy earlier propounded by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, would be a body blow to the fossil fuel industry and a huge step forward. Furthermore, there are a lot of environment-related powers that the President has already received from past legislation. President Biden will be able to create national monuments with the stroke of a pen, perhaps even granting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge the protections it deserves. Furthermore, even if a Republican-packed Supreme Court annuls *Massachusetts v. EPA*, the critical 2009 ruling that allowed Obama to regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant, Biden could hypothetically still effectively mandate massive emissions reduction by substantially raising the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for pollutants commonly emitted alongside CO₂-a power granted to the executive branch by the Clean Air Act. The President-elect has also put forth a wide range of other good ideas-some of which will require Congress to be cooperative, some which won't-at <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>.

These next four years will be historic. Led by Biden and Harris, the United States will at long last be working towards a good Anthropocene.



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People voted for a lot of other cool things around the country, as well! **Colorado** voted to reintroduce wolves to the state, the first time such a reintroduction has been invited at the ballot box. Wolves were hunted and trapped to extinction in Colorado by the 1940s, but the new win mandates their return by 2023. Soon, the Rocky Mountain State could be seeing the ecosystem-wide benefits brought by the return of a keystone species, from thinned and healthier elk herds causing less overgrazing and erosion to wolverines, ravens, eagles, and bears snacking on unfinished wolf kills. Rewilding continues to advance, around the world! For more, see tinyurl.com/ColoradoWolves2023.

And the good people of **Nevada** approved Question 6, an amendment to the state constitution mandating that utilities get 50% of their electricity from renewables by 2030. The same target had already been passed into law by the Democratic-controlled (and incidentally majority-female) Nevada state legislature in 2019, but this win sets it in stone, so it can't be reversed by any future Republican administrations. For more, see tinyurl.com/NevadaQuestion6.

East Asian Carbon Commitments. As the US election reached its final days, several East Asian countries made powerful commitments to reduce their carbon emissions. On October 26th, new Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced that **Japan** would slash its carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050, a major shift for a country that has historically relied on coal and is the fifth-largest carbon dioxide emitter of any nation. (For more, see tinyurl.com/Japan2050). On October 27th, the **Philippines** government announced a moratorium on new greenfield coal-fired power plants, which activists are pushing to make permanent. The Philippines has also historically relied heavily on coal, and this announcement is a major market signal for investment in renewables. (For more, see tinyurl.com/PhilippinesCoal). Finally, on October 28th, South Korean President Moon Jae-in followed through on his earlier election pledge and formally committed **South Korea** (the seventh-largest national CO₂ emitter) to cut its carbon emissions to 2050 as well. (For more, see tinyurl.com/SouthKorea2050). These rapid steps forward have also put pressure on Scott Morrison, Australian PM, to change his notoriously pro-fossil fuel policies. Although the coal-loving PM isn't budging, ANZ Bank, one of Australia's largest, has updated its climate policy to fund less thermal coal and support net-zero goals by 2050. This is all excellent news, and further evidence that around the world, policy and markets are turning towards the bright, clean future of renewable energy! For more, see tinyurl.com/WhenLastCoalPlant.

Australia. Scientists have discovered a "blade-like" detached reef taller than the Empire State Building off the northern end of the Great Barrier Reef. For more, see tinyurl.com/SkyscraperReef.



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Laptev Sea. For the first time since records began, the Laptev Sea did not start freezing by late October. This sounds trivial, but the Laptev Sea is the “nursery” of Arctic sea ice, and this could have effects across the Arctic Ocean. This has likely been caused by 2020’s freakish Siberian heatwave, which one study found was made 600 times more likely by human-caused global warming. “It is more frustrating than



shocking.” said sea ice physics specialist Dr. Stefan Hendricks of the Alfred Wegener Institute. “This has been forecast for a long time, but there has been little substantial response by decision-makers.” For more, see tinyurl.com/LaptevSea.

Hurricane Eta. Hurricane Eta, making landfall in Central America as a Category Four on November 3rd, has killed dozens of people across Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and is now nearing Florida. This is the first “Hurricane Eta” ever, as 2020 was the first time there have been so many Atlantic hurricanes in one season (28 named storms to date) that naming conventions went as far as that letter of the Greek alphabet. This is not normal. For more, see tinyurl.com/HurricaneEta2020.

Sri Lanka. Local volunteers and the Sri Lankan Navy worked together to successfully return over 100 short-finned pilot whales to the sea after a pod was stranded on a beach near Colombo. The cause of whale beachings is still unknown. This is a great examples of humans helping out other species! For more, see tinyurl.com/SriLankaWhales.

Madagascar. Last seen over 100 years ago, Voeltzkow’s chameleon (*Furcifer voeltzkowi*, pictured) has been rediscovered in a hotel garden in northwestern Madagascar! For more, see tinyurl.com/ChameleonRediscovered.

