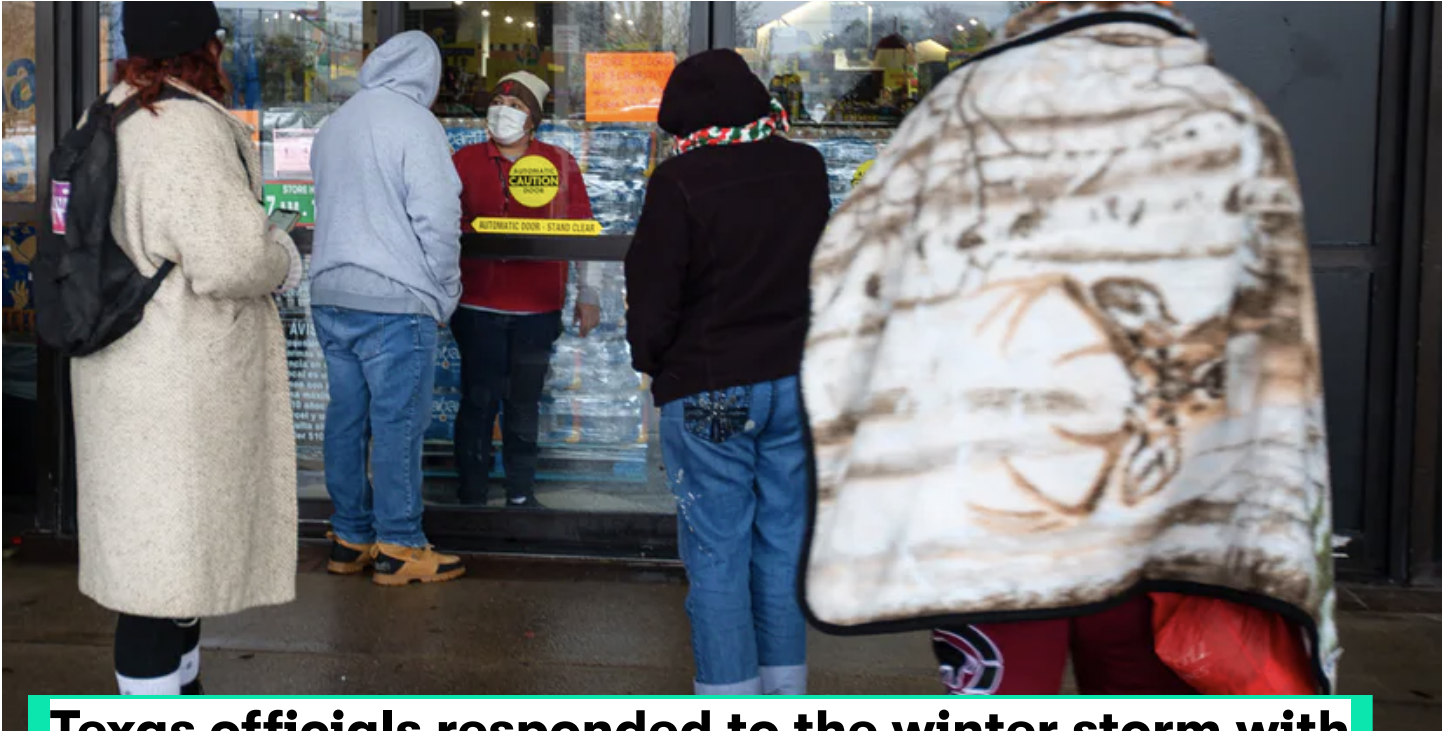


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Texas officials responded to the winter storm with propaganda they got from a pro-fossil fuel think tank

By [AJ Dellinger](#)

April 1, 2021

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In February, Texas experienced an unprecedented winter storm that saw roads shut down from snowfall and millions left without power as the state's electric grid failed in freezing temperatures. The situation was so bad that the CEO of the state's grid operator said that the grid was mere minutes away from a total collapse. And yet, while the storm that killed at least 86 people continued, Texas oil and gas regulators spent their days circulating climate change denialism talking points, according to a report from NBC News.

The talking points, which claimed that renewable energy sources like wind and

solar power are "often useless when you need them most," originated from Alex Epstein, author of *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels* and the founder of the for-profit think tank the Center for Industrial Progress. Epstein, a climate skeptic and fossil fuel fanboy, reportedly provided talking points to a number of Texas politicians via email and hosted a briefing on Zoom to which a number of state officials — including Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's chief of staff Luis Saenz — were invited. According to NBC News, talking points from Epstein landed in the inbox of a number of officials in the governor's office and at the Railroad Commission, the state's primary oil and gas industry regulator.

It certainly wasn't hard to find Epstein's agenda in action. Once Texas leaders got their hands on the messaging, they ran with it. On the same day that Epstein's email hit inboxes, Railroad Commission member Wayne Christian retweeted Epstein and issued a statement warning of the "dangers of relying too heavily on unreliable, intermittent forms of electric generation like wind and solar" to meet the state's energy needs. Later that evening, Abbott appeared on Sean Hannity's Fox News show to use a deadly natural disaster to declare that "the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of America."

Texas officials pulled this stunt over and over again, pointing to frozen wind turbines as the supposed reason for the power outage. Despite the fact that wind makes up just 10% of the state's energy production while natural gas and coal account for 72%, and despite the fact that Texas operates largely independently from any federal regulation, Epstein pushed the following message, per NBC News: "Here's the bottom line: The root cause of the [Texas] blackouts is a national and state policy that has prioritized the adoption of unreliable wind/solar energy over reliable energy."

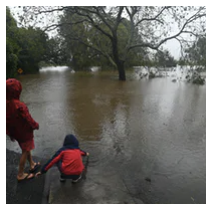
Texas officials proved capable of regurgitating that message no problem and did so at every turn — and apparently have been for some time. NBC News reported that Epstein hosts weekly calls that Texas officials can join, and that he regularly

sends climate-denying memos as part of an "Energy Talking Points" service, which gets passed around the Texas government regularly. On Feb. 22, an edition of the email with new information and praise for officials who happily spewed the previous messages landed in the inbox of the spokesperson for a Railroad Commission member, who then forwarded the message to three Texas oil and gas lobbying groups with the note, "Talking points from Alex Epstein. Not sure if y'all call in to his calls but wanted to see what he sent out today."

It should come as no surprise that Texas officials are so cozy with someone so heavily invested in promoting fossil fuels. After all, Abbott himself apparently took meetings with a right-wing, anti-science meteorologist as the winter storm was about to hit. Oil is Texas's primary export, so it has a vested interest in defending the dirty-burning energy source.

Still, it's a little shocking just how brazenly they eat this shit up and how transparent they are about pushing bad information. Epstein provides talking points, officials go repeat them, and then Epstein points to these officials backing what he said as evidence that he was right all along. Wash, rinse, repeat.

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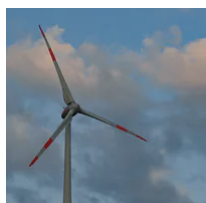
Australia is a terrifying preview of a world ravaged by climate change

By AJ DELLINGER



After devastating floods, Australians could soon be dealing with a "plague" of deadly spiders

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Biden is going big on offshore wind — and it could create tens of thousands of new jobs

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After devastating floods, Australians could soon be dealing with a "plague" of deadly spiders

By [AJ Dellinger](#)

March 24, 2021

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Eastern Australia has been getting hammered by torrential rain and flooding for the better part of a week now, resulting in tens of thousands of people being forced to leave their homes. Making matters worse, some new eight-legged residents have apparently moved in and claimed squatter's rights. Residents in the flood-ravaged state of New South Wales may soon have to contend with deadly funnel-web spiders seeking higher and dryer ground in people's homes.

Tim Faulkner, director of the Australian Reptile Park, told News.Com.Au that current weather conditions — particularly the combination of humid weather and extensive floodwaters — are creating a perfect storm for swarms of the venomous spiders to appear. “Not only are we seeing increased movement due to humidity, but we’re already seeing a plague of ground-dwelling spiders searching for higher ground, out of the floodwaters,” Faulkner said.

It's not uncommon for funnel-web spiders to pop their creepy little heads out of the woodwork following a rainstorm. They tend to be attracted to the warm, humid conditions — which is also why Australians regularly spot them in swimming pools. But in the wake of the seemingly endless rainstorms that have hovered over eastern Australia for the last week, the spiders — which can't climb on smooth surfaces and are typically more ground-bound than most of the arachnid family — are expected to be out in even greater numbers. “They have been forced out of their habitat and are seeking refuge in dryer areas,” Faulkner said. “Unfortunately, this could mean that they’ll be finding their way into residential homes very shortly.”

Some people have already documented hundreds of insects crawling around in their homes following the storms — but not all of them are cause for serious concern. While any spider is enough to elicit a shriek, most of them are harmless. Funnel-web spiders, though, are no joke. These spiders can grow to be about two inches long — and while they aren't great climbers and don't jump, they are

capable of moving incredibly fast and have made a habit of setting up shop in piles of clothes or inside shoes. That kind of sneaky presence can lead to the exact interaction you *don't* want with a funnel-web spider, which carries a venom that's quite toxic to humans. Bites from the funnel-web spider can cause severe, rapidly progressing symptoms, like facial paresthesias, vomiting, and shortness of breath.

At least 13 people have died at the hands of the spiders — but those cases were all recorded prior to the discovery of an anti-venom in 1981. There have been no known deaths since then, but treatment does need to be applied quickly, within a few hours of the bite, to be effective. With many roads still blocked off throughout New South Wales as a result of flooding, getting care could become a challenge.

Research suggests that while the venom in funnel-web spiders is particularly dangerous in humans, the arachnids don't actually go out of their way to hurt people. That may not come as much comfort to the Australians who may be sharing living space with the spiders in the coming days. But, much like the thousands of humans who have been pushed from their homes by the floods, the spiders are just trying to survive the storms. The extreme weather caused by climate change really does impact everyone, regardless of how many legs you have.

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Biden is going big on offshore wind — and it could create tens of thousands of new jobs

By AJ Dellinger

March 29, 2021

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The Jersey Shore, sadly a dumping ground for both toxic pollution and culture, is going to have an opportunity to clean up its reputation and, in turn, the country. On Monday, the Biden administration announced that it will mark off a large swath of water between the south shore of Long Island and the New Jersey coast to be used for offshore wind projects. The move will seek to kickstart the essential production of clean and renewable wind-powered energy on the East Coast — and potentially create tens of thousands of jobs in the process.

The area pegged for future wind farm projects is the New York Bight, a region of shallow waters located between Long Island, New York, and the New Jersey coast. The decision to dedicate this area to wind energy was accompanied by an announcement that the Biden administration will make available \$3 billion in loan

guarantees to wind farm projects, with the goal of producing 30 gigawatts (30,000 megawatts) of power from offshore wind by 2030. That would be enough to power an estimated 9 million homes solely with the renewable clean power source, while cutting as much as 78 million metric tons of carbon emissions.

The major investment in offshore wind follows an announcement earlier this month that the Biden administration would grant approval to the development of an offshore wind farm off the coast of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, which is set to become the largest such project in the country. The decision to mark part of the New York/New Jersey coastline for further development of offshore wind production suggests that Biden is going all in on the clean energy solution. By 2030, as many as 2,000 turbines could be constructed in the Atlantic Ocean, according to the Department of the Interior.

It's an area ripe for capturing wind power, too. According to a study published last year by global energy consultancy group Wood Mackenzie, the New York Bight region could support nearly 40,000 jobs in the next decade. That includes 25,000 development and construction jobs, 7,000 community-based jobs to support development, plus 4,000 operations and maintenance jobs and 2,000 more community jobs in the years following the construction of the wind farms — and that's just in one narrow region of the country. The Biden administration estimates that meeting its offshore energy production goal of 30 gigawatts by 2030 would result in more than 44,000 workers being employed in the offshore wind industry and nearly 33,000 jobs in communities supported by wind activity.

These clean energy projects are important, not just because they help to cut emissions and wean the country off its addiction to fossil fuels, but because they will create jobs for tens of thousands of people. One of the major criticisms that climate skeptics leveled against the Biden administration's decision to cancel permits for the Keystone XL pipeline was that it would kill jobs. Now there is a

clear opportunity to create jobs while saving the planet. Surely, if these critics are as interested in creating and saving jobs as they claim, they will celebrate the opportunity for upward of 77,000 Americans to achieve well-paying jobs. If not, one just might start to wonder if their criticisms are being made in bad faith.