

15 - Battling climate change starts with military action

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The effects of climate change are all around. They can be seen by the Gulf Coast bracing for seven named storms in 2020; wildfires in California interrupting electricity for hundreds of thousands; and winter storms leaving millions without power. The changes I recommend will help solve problems that the military has been partially responsible for creating.

The military is currently trying to adapt to the instability it is partially responsible for. The Department of Defense consumes more energy than any other organization in the U.S., most of which is dirty energy. It maintains over 500,000 buildings, the majority of which are more than 50 years old, and uses about 70 million gallons of automotive fuel for nontactical vehicles per year. This is enough to drive around the Earth 141 times.

President Joe Biden promised to “Build Back Better,” creating American jobs in the green energy sector, improving building standards and generating new green innovation. This ambitious and necessary plan has another avenue to stimulate the new green economy and address the climate crisis that wouldn’t require congressional squabbling.

As of 2014, two of the top 10 solar panel producers are in the United States; of the others, six reside in China. How can the president jump-start the new economy and create American jobs in the process? By investing \$8 billion in renewable energy for the DoD. This will save money, provide energy security, greatly reduce its carbon footprint and create thousands of jobs. In 2017, the DoD spent \$3.57 billion on energy for noncombat operations. Installing solar panels on DoD buildings and adding small wind turbines to half of military buildings would cost \$8 billion, but it would provide enough energy to power the equivalent of 750,000 homes.

Changing the military’s noncombat vehicles to electric would encourage electric vehicle-manufacturing facilities to open in the U.S., save \$170 million per year and prevent 702,000 tons of carbon injected into the atmosphere. It would create lasting jobs and companies within our borders. The \$8 billion would pay for itself in less than three years from the savings gained through renewable energy to the military.

President Biden has pledged to reduce the carbon footprint of U.S. buildings. Passive house standards reduce heating and cooling costs by 90. Requiring new military construction to be built to this standard and retrofitting older buildings would greatly reduce their carbon footprint. Microgrids — or small networks of electricity users with a local source of supply — are the future of electricity. Military facilities with installed renewables are the perfect place to test this new technology through a public-private venture.

With one stroke of his pen, President Biden can provide support and leadership our nation needs to rise to the challenge and seize these opportunities. An executive order on federal agency leadership for clean energy, efficiency, electrification, climate resilience and energy security can start with the DoD and extend throughout the nation. Doing so will make our country and military stronger, create American jobs and save money.