

Opinion



US president-elect Biden favors the development of renewable energy but his Mexican counterpart is betting on fossil fuels.

Environmentalists see blue skies ahead under new US administration

They also see an opportunity for the US to convince Mexico that era of fossil fuels is coming to an end

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As scientists and environmentalists — one *mexicano*, one *estadounidense* — we believe that the 46th United States president, Joseph Biden, will fulfill his campaign promises of placing environmental protection and climate change at the center of his administration's agenda.

And we look forward to President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris exercising a respectful cooperation and leadership with other nations – a leadership founded on true multilateralism. Tens of millions of Americans who gave them their vote expect nothing less, and the billions of people around the world cheering the election win will accept no less.

The U.S. and Mexico share a border of 3,000 kilometers, extending through some of the world's most magnificent landscapes. From the banks of the Rio Grande, across the vibrant-with-life deserts of Sonora and Chihuahua bordering Texas and Arizona, to the Colorado River and Sea of Cortés, through breadbaskets of Arizona and California, to the Pacific Ocean – where the mighty gray whales have migrated for millennia between Alaska and Baja California to connect our two geographies.

And crossing the border through blue skies are millions of tiny, orange-and-black monarch butterflies weighing only half a gram but linking the hopes and aspirations of millions of U.S. and Mexican citizens through their annual migrations.

We are convinced that, despite past misgivings and sometimes mutual mistrust, for the most part the peoples of the two nations love and respect each other. Not only because we share landscapes and iconic species, but also because we depend on each other to culturally and economically thrive as neighbor nations.

It is in this context that we believe the next four years offer Presidents Biden and López Obrador an exceptional opportunity to boost an important binational alliance, one that helps tackle two of our most pressing environmental challenges: global warming and the loss of biodiversity. It is a unique moment in time for our nations to make history together.

For four years, Donald Trump led an unprecedented offensive to weaken scientific institutions and malign science and scientists. He degraded the Environmental Protection Agency and used it to undermine regulations on protected areas, wetlands, fisheries, and endangered species. His administration dismantled most public policies and institutional foundations needed to curb global warming and protect the environment and people, and he rolled back regulations for carbon dioxide emissions, toxic chemicals, food safety, and air and water pollution.

He even stopped payments to the Green Climate Fund – a UN program to assist developing countries in reducing carbon emissions.

But he might be most remembered as the builder of an infamous “wall” — a wall that offended all Mexicans and most *estadounidenses*, fragmented ancestral indigenous lands and some of the most mind-boggling landscapes on Earth; a wall that crippled hundreds of North America’s wild migratory species from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico.

But now comes the time for reconstruction, a time for healing and renewed partnership between our two countries. There are countless areas in which we can work together to improve our tightly linked societies and landscapes — such as immigration, trade, drug trafficking and gun smuggling, climate change, and biodiversity protection. As environmentalists, we herein focus on the last two.

The U.S. is the world’s second largest greenhouse gas emitter, while Mexico is the world’s 12th (and the largest in Latin America). Although fossil fuels still dominate the energy mix in the U.S., renewable energies are growing quickly. President Biden is expected to step up policies and efforts to fulfill his promise to invest nearly \$2 trillion in infrastructure spending, focused mostly on renewable energy, as an opportunity to reestablish the U.S. as a global economic, environmental, and political leader. He wants to put the U.S. on an irreversible path to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by no later than 2050; an easily achievable goal that can also boost the economy.



Mexico’s López Obrador has favored fossil fuels over renewables.

On the other hand, President Lopez Obrador’s administration is betting on expanding Mexico’s fossil fuels capabilities, such as new oil refineries and boosting carbon production and use. This likely means the country would not fulfill its goal in the Paris Agreement to reduce emissions by 22% by 2030.

We believe there is ample room for the U.S. and Mexican governments to work in tandem for a renewed push in both the Paris Agreement and the Green Climate Fund, which are the most important current international agreements for tackling climate change. And there is also opportunity for President Biden to try to convince President López Obrador that the era of fossil fuels is rapidly coming to an end, and that renewable energies would not only reduce electricity prices to the people, but also create hundreds of thousands of new jobs across both countries.

Mexico and the U.S. are two of the world's most biodiverse countries. They share a unique array of habitats and species, including 450 species listed under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and over 100 species on the U.S. Endangered Species list. These species include many migratory mammals and birds, as well as native fish, amphibians, reptiles, and insects.

The U.S. national parks and Mexico's protected areas system are both exemplars for the world. For decades, the two countries have invested billions to strengthen those protected areas, which have proven to be the best strategies yet to protect ecosystems, indigenous lands, and the associated environmental services on which the health and wellbeing of 335 million Americans and 130 million Mexicans depend.

This December, as the third year of President López Obrador's administration begins, we hope he gives the environment the priority it deserves for the remaining four years of his mandate. And President Biden must join the other 196 countries in the world by signing on to the pivotal Convention on Biological Diversity and help protect planet Earth for this and future generations.

Presidents López Obrador and Biden – and all *mexicanos* and *estadounidenses* – must seize the moment to work closely on those issues that bind us, not those that separate us. We cannot think of a better cause for our two nations to partner on than protecting our precious shared environment.

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