Twitter Thread by brad plumer

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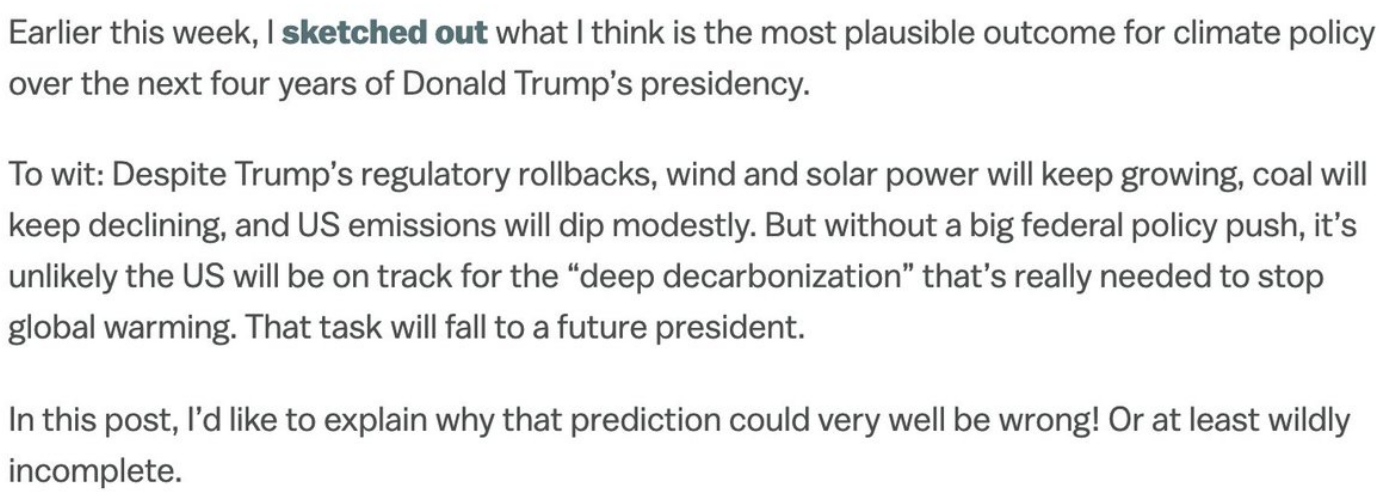
What were the big energy and climate surprises of the Trump era? Four years ago, I described the most plausible arc for US climate policy under Trump (it was a boring, safe bet) but expected there'd be unexpected developments too. So how about a look back? https://t.co/1Valz4eTEg



1) The pandemic was a huge surprise, obviously, though maybe it's too early to say how that will affect the energy/climate landscape. So far, it's put a brake on U.S. fracking and induced Europe to pledge staggering sums on hydrogen. Maybe global CO2 emissions have peaked, idk.

2) The growth of battery storage on the US grid has, I think, been a surprise. This interview with @jburwen does a nice job of laying out the truly staggering changes in the storage landscape since 2015, driven by falling costs and some key policy changes. https://t.co/VtIFsTkOPj

3) The impact of the IPCC report on 1.5°C was surprising to me. I often wondered what'd happen once it became clear that the world was unlikely to stay below 2°C. Instead, the climate community and world leaders rallied around an even more aggressive, harder to hit target!

4) It was not obvious that Trump's retreat from climate action would spur states, cities, companies, other nations to make even more aggressive net zero pledges of their own. But that's what happened—those pledges have really proliferated at a scale that's been surprising to me.

5) How about the recent energy bill? I'd written a fair bit about how things like carbon capture and HFC cuts had big bipartisan support (e.g. https://t.co/VWiq4o2BO3) , but I wouldn't have predicted Congress to increase energy R&D as massively over the last 4 years as they did.

This thread was inspired by a nice @mattyglesias post on predictions — few people ever make specific predictions and then go back to see if they were right/wrong. More people probably should! (I didn't, so my retrospective is obviously pretty squishy.) https://t.co/t6vzf3R1Df

Anyway, what were your big climate/energy surprises from the last four years?

This is a really good one. Will be interesting to see how this plays out as the pandemic recedes, whenever that might be: https://t.co/fP0LEPKaAO

> Niche issue here, but the rise of the #flygskam/\u201cflying shame\u201d movement was a big surprise for me. Currently masked by the COVID epidemic but "fly less\u201d now being on every top 5 climate action list is a huge change that will reverberate.
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> — Dan Rutherford (@rutherdan) December 29, 2020

Yeah this chart really underscores the energy R&D surprise. In 2017, plenty of folks thought Congress would probably reject Trump's deep proposed cuts to the Energy Department. Not many predicted that energy research spending would rise ~20% in four years: https://t.co/U3QinSibHw

> This is what it looked like in constant dollars. 2016 was the last year signed by Obama. pic.twitter.com/PpIDOJ0zU8
>
> — Matt Hourihan (@MattHourihan) December 29, 2020