

Foreign Policy

Why Bloomberg Endorsed Obama

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Yes, it really is climate change, stupid.



When it rains, it pours. First came Sandy, the [incarnation](#) of the Rumsfeldian “unknown unknowns.” Then came the political hurricane, with three-term New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg [endorsing](#) Barack Obama for his second.

Bloomberg’s endorsement is unusual for a number of reasons, not least because the famously tri-partisan mayor eschewed an endorsement four years ago, has slapped the president’s wrist in the past, and [all but snubbed](#) him when Obama offered to tour the devastation in New York City, leaving

the president to **embrace** New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, one of Mitt Romney's most outspoken surrogates.

Here's the kicker: Bloomberg titled his endorsement, published in his eponymous news outlet, "**A Vote for a President to Lead on Climate Change.**"

Climate campaigners — full disclosure: I among them — have long wondered what it would take to jolt the collective conscience. **A dramatic, non-catastrophic event** tops that list. Our Pearl Harbor, if you will. Hurricane Sandy may be just that event.

It helps to have a dramatic buildup. The 1980s rank as the third-hottest decade on record, the 1990s the second-hottest, and the 2000s the hottest. Things haven't let up since. This year saw record summer heat waves, with thousands of local temperature records broken throughout the United States. July was the **hottest** month since U.S. recordkeeping began in 1895. It also capped the hottest 12-month-period ever. More than half of the United States has been facing "**moderate to extreme drought**" this summer. Droughts, floods, storms — you name them. We've all felt them personally. Global warming is so real by now that it no longer requires scientists to interpret results for us. Then came Sandy.

The three letters behind my name and standard journalistic decorum obligate me to remind everyone that no single extreme weather event is due to climate change. As far as we know, climate change does not seem to make hurricanes **more frequent**, and yes, there were storms of biblical proportions before man started burning coal.

We do know that the hurricanes we see are stronger because of an ever-warming globe — and high-school chemistry and physics tells us that the warming is manmade. Climate change doesn't hand hurricanes a bike or bat. But it acts like the steroids that allow you to muscle your way to seven consecutive Tour de France titles or to homerun records.

The numbers paint a clear picture. Today's waters off New York City are 1 foot higher and 1 degree Fahrenheit warmer **because of global warming**. Lower Manhattan was swamped by 14 feet of storm surge. That extra foot would certainly have pushed some flooding over the edge. Similarly, sea-surface temperatures in some areas were five degrees above normal, making Sandy so intense. Scientists can **link one of these five degrees** directly to our burning fossil fuels. And then there are the more indirect links, like excess atmospheric energy, redirected jet streams, and Mike Bloomberg steaming.

OK, not the last one — but Bloomberg’s calculated endorsement brought all of the above to the fore. Stanford’s Jon Krosnick argues that the United States has long had a [climate majority](#) among its electorate, with around three-quarters of Americans saying correctly that it’s real and humans are the cause. Vast sums of money, however, are pushing the other way, with predictable results. After 24 years, this election cycle marks the first time that no presidential debate included a question on climate change. Neither candidate volunteered his views. Quite the contrary: Obama and Romney seemed to out-compete each other for the title of who is friendlier to the coal industry. Obama had to go on MTV to [face a climate question](#), coincidentally asked by a viewer from New Jersey.

Sandy showed how even — or especially — America’s greatest city cannot escape global warming. Bloomberg’s endorsement ensured there’s no escaping it politically.

Bloomberg has made a calculated political decision based on both electoral politics and hardnosed actuarial statistics facing his city. Here’s hoping one of New York’s most committed mayors and richest citizens follows through on his endorsement and jumpstarts a national conversation that ends with limiting carbon pollution.

One possible indication of where we are heading: The same day as the mayor’s endorsement, Bloomberg’s *BusinessWeek* put Sandy on its cover, under the headline: “[It’s Global Warming, Stupid.](#)”

It is.

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