

During the campaign, Trump said he would save \$100 billion by cutting climate programs. His campaign staff referred as support to a report, which said that 75% of the funding was energy related and included “about 68 percent for energy technology, 23 percent for science, 8 percent for international assistance and 1 percent for adaptation to climate change.” The chair of the House Science Committee has dedicated himself to attacking climate science, which Trump thinks is a hoax, so it’s not at all far-fetched to think that this funding could be slashed or eliminated.

We need that research now more than ever. We need to track the impacts of climate change to begin coping with the increase in sea level rise and extreme weather events. We also need to ramp up basic research related to energy technology. If the federal government isn’t going to help mandate use of clean energy, we need to find ways to make it cheaper. We also need to find ways to cut emissions very quickly in the post-Trump era, when as a nation we can get back to work on addressing climate change. Some of this funding can come from industry or foundations, but traditionally the mainstay of basic research has been the federal government. It’s not hard to imagine a set-up where there would be a public-private partnership to fund the research.

Basic research on new energy technologies would be an economic benefit to California, laying the foundation for Silicon Valley to perfect and market the new technologies globally. California can’t afford to fill the entire gap if Trump ends federal funding, but we could make a real start. And yes, it could help give California’s universities — especially its public universities — a much-needed shot in the arm. Funding could either come from a new voter initiative, from the revenue produced by the AB32 auctions, or from a public interest fee charged by the Public Utility Commission.

Funding research may not be glamorous, but California is a world leader in cutting-edge science and engineering. The Governor and the Legislature shouldn’t wait for the axe to fall on federal funding before starting to think about alternatives.