

## Lopez, Donna

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**From:** Melissa Ludtke <melissa.ludtke@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, February 22, 2015 9:51 AM  
**To:** Carlone, Dennis; Benzan, Dennis; Kelley, Craig; McGovern, Marc; ttoomey@cambridge.ma.gov; Simmons, Denise; Maher, David; Cheung, Leland; City Council; Lopez, Donna  
**Subject:** Thank You for passage of Policy Order #18

I came on Friday to speak in favor of Policy Order #18's passage, and in my remarks I mentioned the disservice we've done by speaking about climate change as "global warming," for when a winter like this one occurs, skeptics of fossil fuel's impact seek advantage since the road to public awareness requires an added step to appreciate the actual impact of what happens when WE change the way Mother Nature has done her job for centuries.

Thank you for hearing those who spoke on Friday — and the message of Mothers Out Front — and I look forward to following next steps as we advance toward a goal worthy of our children,

Melissa Ludtke

## How the polar vortex is affecting the American south

People in the midwest and north-east are better off than other US regions because as the Arctic air hits, those furthest south are the least prepared



Pedestrians make their way along ice covered sidewalks and streets in Nashville, Tennessee, after winter storm Octavia moved across the southern US earlier this week. Photograph: Eric England/EPA

Eric Klinenberg

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This week Americans are learning firsthand about a paradox of global warming: it will generate colder, snowier weather systems, even in places unaccustomed to deep freezes. The new, man-made climate, which scientists call the Anthropocene, is ushering in an age of extremes.

The polar vortex that's now delivering Arctic air into the United States has produced some scary, spectacular images: the mountains of snow in Boston, the ice blocks on the shores of Chicago, the frozen Niagara Falls. The residents of these places are suffering from the dangerous cold snap, particularly the homeless but also very impoverished old people, whose economic insecurity sometimes prevents them from using the heat.



# Niagara Falls freezes over as polar vortex drops temperatures – pictures

And they're likely to see more treacherous cold in coming years, because the long-term forecast for the north-east and midwest calls for a spike in damaging winter storms. That means more stress on the aging, dilapidated infrastructure of older cities and suburbs; more maintenance costs for home-owners and service costs for municipalities; more disruptions of school and business schedules; more automobile accidents; more aching all around.

But in the cold calculus of climate change, people in the midwest and north-east may well be better off than those in the south, because they already have local governments that know how to handle extreme winter weather and an ample supply of insulated buildings that can hold the heat. When the same Arctic air hits Boston, Baltimore and Biloxi, those furthest South will be least prepared, and less able to adapt.

Consider the early death tolls from this week's record-setting cold snap (albeit with caution, since official mortality counts during disasters are inconsistent and sometimes unreliable). As of Friday, [Tennessee had reported](#) eleven deaths, six from hypothermia, which is greater than the early toll in Illinois, Ohio and Massachusetts, combined. Investigators are also examining several possible cold fatalities in Kentucky and Maryland, and now another ice storm is on the way.

According to research by the geographers Kevin Borden and Susan Cutter, between 1970 and 2004 extreme cold was the second most lethal form of severe weather in the United States, ranking just behind heat waves. In those decades, unsurprisingly, cold deaths were concentrated in the Northern-most regions of the country. And they probably will continue to cluster there, since scientists expect the North to get colder winters while the South gets generally warmer as the climate changes. But that's not the whole story: As this week's weather reminds us, the volatile conditions associated with the Anthropocene may lead to more frequent outbursts of weird winter weather in places that don't normally get them. And it's notoriously difficult to protect people from extreme events that don't seem to belong where they are.

Preparing for extreme weather isn't only about raising awareness and changing citizen behavior. It also requires building an appropriate, resilient infrastructure for housing, transit, electricity, fuel, and communications. That's an expensive endeavor.

Begin with the most basic way we protect ourselves from the elements: putting up four walls and a roof. In regions where residents are accustomed to cold winters, developers build well-insulated walls, install thick windows, and use powerful heating systems. In the south, where keeping the indoors cool has always been a major challenge, many houses aren't made to withstand ferocious cold and recurrent ice storms.

Southern transit networks are also ill-equipped for whiteout conditions, as every New Englander who gets incredulous when a light wintry mix cripples Washington DC knows. City governments don't have fleets of snowplows and tons of salt on alert throughout the winter. Motorists don't have ice scrapers for their windshields, let alone snow tires or skills for navigating icy roads.

There are ripple effects when winter weather shuts down schools and businesses. Millions of children throughout the south depend on school for a warm daily meal, sometimes two. For them snow days are also days of hunger or malnutrition, and for their parents they are days without childcare, which can mean sinking further into poverty or getting into trouble at work. The same is true when shops and offices shut down,

particularly if there is an extended crisis due to road closures or loss of electricity. We don't have good ways to measure these impacts of extreme weather, but as the climate changes we will probably need to develop them.

First, though, we will need to do a better job naming and identifying these major winter weather events as genuine social disasters. Hurricanes get names and, if they're significant, stories. Earthquakes get numbers on a Richter scale. Even heat waves, our great, invisible killer, are usually discrete events. But freezing weather bleeds us slowly, taking its toll over a long season of dull pain. How many people will die in this week's record-breaking cold snap? We may never know the answer. How will we protect people from the winter storms to come, or, better, begin reversing the damage we've done to the environment? It's long past time to figure that out.

*Eric Klinenberg is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at NYU. He's the author of Heat Wave, and he tweets at @ericklinenberg.*

Melissa Ludtke

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