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The opponents of cloud-seeding come for geoengineering

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On top of the world, looking over the edge PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY

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something conspiracists have always known was true.

Among those who feared a sinister plot are several Republican politicians, including Marjorie Taylor Greene, a congresswoman from Georgia. In the aftermath of the floods Ms Greene published several social-media posts warning of the dangers of weather modification. The congresswoman has form on this. “Yes they control the weather,” she wrote on X after Hurricane Helene hit North Carolina particularly hard last September. On July 15th she proposed the Clear Skies Act, a federal ban on weather modification. If passed (which is unlikely), the legislation would make it a felony to release chemicals into the atmosphere with intent to modify the weather.



MAP: THE ECONOMIST

The bill fits into a broader trend. This year 22 states have introduced bills to ban or restrict weather modification. In Florida, which enacted its law in June, meddling with the weather carries a prison sentence of up to five years. In many states this is a cost-free way for state legislators to signal their hostility to the federal government and openness to conspiracy theories, since only a small number of states in the West actually do it (see map).

Cloud-seeding has been carried out in America since its invention in the

1940s by scientists at General Electric Research Laboratories, New York. Commercial and government cloud-seeding operations spread and by the 1950s about 300m acres (1.2m square kilometres) of land were targeted for cloud-seeding. While the efficacy of the technique remains contested, a study in the *Journal of Applied Meteorology and Climatology* in 2014 found it can increase rainfall by up to 15%. Jonathan Jennings, a meteorologist who directs the cloud-

rain when there is a drought.

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The federal government does not carry out cloud-seeding, but nine states have active programmes. Rainmaker's operation on July 2nd was contracted by the South Texas Weather Modification Association, an organisation of local water agencies. What had hitherto been practised quietly is becoming tangled up in bad faith and worse science. The Climate Science Legal Defence Fund has provided legal aid to scientists who have been the subject of doxxing (the practice of publishing private information without consent) and lawsuits from weather conspiracy theorists.

Wrapped up in the hostility towards cloud-seeding is a stronger animus towards geoengineering—the idea of deliberately cooling the Earth. The proposed federal ban on weather modification would outlaw research on solar geoengineering, which includes spraying sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere. Solar geoengineering is controversial, but more research is needed to understand its risks. The Florida law prohibits “geoengineering and weather modification”; Ms Taylor Greene's bill includes solar geoengineering and solar-radiation

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