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ANDREW LIMBONG, HOST:

Our planet's lungs could be on the verge of collapse. The Amazon rainforest is a lush ecosystem larger than half of the continental U.S., and it is in serious danger. Over the past four years, deforestation reached historic levels, and experts say we're near a tipping point that could have dire global consequences. Sixty percent of the Amazon lies in Brazil, and saving the rainforest is a top priority for Brazil's new president, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, better known as Lula, who took office for the second time this week. Protecting the Amazon was a priority during his last presidency two decades ago, and he's pledged to revitalize those efforts this go-around.

LIMBONG: All right. So, now, climate change and deforestation can be a pretty big subject to tackle, so I kind of just want to start with the basics. How dire is this situation, and how did we get here?

BERENGUER: Yes. So since his campaign trail, Bolsonaro has been pretty against the environment and against the forest and promoting the false dichotomy of you either have development or you have conservation. But that's not true. The Amazon has been developed for the past 50 years of the opening of roads, large-scale farming, and is still the poorest part of Brazil, with Human Development Indexes similar to those of several countries in Africa, as opposed to the rest of Brazil, which some areas have of their Human Development Index is similar to some countries in Europe. So that's the contrast of how the Amazon is more poor despite its so-called development. But he insisted on that idea, and he's been promoting deforestation during the past four years by completely weakening environmental legislation, regulation. And it's been quite dire for the forest.

LIMBONG: Yeah. So what can he do to sort of gin up support for these efforts among the people?

BERENGUER: Brazil has been dominated by fake news, a tsunami of fake videos and photos and memes on WhatsApp constantly. So a strong communication on the importance of conserving the rainforest and what the government is doing for it, it's key, but also what Brazil needs is international help, and that is already happening. So that is actually a good sign. So Norway and Germany both have said that the funds that they have allocated for the Amazon fund, which Brazil has had since 2008 to help finance the combat of deforestation in the Amazon, that was suspended during the Bolsonaro government because deforestation was increasing, Germany and Norway already said, well, the money is active again, and that's because of the signs that your new government is giving that it will be strong in fighting deforestation. So that is actually really positive news, and something