

GLENWOOD SPRINGS

POST INDEPENDENT

Guest Opinion: Warming is real and you have a responsibility

By David Schroeder

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I have recently reviewed extensively the literature around the science and controversy of Anthropogenic Global Warming, hereafter AGW. This review was prompted by participation in a blog site populated by fellow West Point alumni. And I must conclude: There is AGW, which, unabated, will cause unprecedented disruption for all species and extinction of many. The time scale is in decades, maybe centuries. Pick your favorite generation to experience the unacceptable end result.

For those observers still not satisfied with their understanding of the issues, I recommend the Wikipedia entry, “Global Warming Controversy.” Here you will find fairly balanced coverage of the politics, the science, the options, etc. It will shorten your time to cover most of the areas I probed. (Wikipedia is not a definitive source. Follow all the citations where they lead and then follow the citations thereby discovered.)

The politics involves deliberate exaggerations on both sides of the argument; on the science side, minor simplifications to motivate the public to support actions needed to avert eventual calamity; on the fossil fuel side, a major disinformation campaign to prolong the interval to taking action, thus maximizing short-term profits; and for the denialist politicians, to keep the campaign funds flowing freely. The money trail starts over 25 years ago with a deliberate plan by gas and oil interests to use the FUD — fear, uncertainty and doubt — principle to confuse the non-scientific public. (See the tobacco lobby, leaded gasoline, etc.)

The majority of credible climate scientists as well as almost all recognized and respected scientific organizations endorse the concept of significant AGW. Most of these are government-subsidized. The scientists paid by the fossil fuelers are either not climatologists, the expected science outliers, those little-published (if at all) in the field, professors emeriti no longer able to publish on the cutting edge or outright kooks. They now earn their livings with opinion pieces in right-wing publications, lecturing the Heartland Institute, ALEC, the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute and Republican energy subcommittees, etc. on minutiae they suggest invalidates the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. One needs to decide whether the credible scientists are fudging critical results as ordered by a disguised or nascent

one-world government (tin foil hats, everyone!) or that the industry shills are obfuscating at the behest of billionaire John Birch types for whom delay means profits. (The Koch brothers and their \$800 million for political action spring to mind.)

There are many scientists and policy analysts (economists, experts in geopolitics and war, biologists, population experts, agronomists, hydrologists and many others) who recognize the complexity and breadth of the issue. Many, including the Environmental Defense Fund, have proposed and even acted on plans to limit the global temperature rise to a current optimistically predicted 2 degrees C. Minimal overall economic pain and even growth are likely. AGW is a global problem demanding global solutions. Since America has a per-capita energy consumption rate that is multiples of other developed nations, not to mention the rest of the world, our leadership is absolutely necessary.

I am pessimistic that we will rise to the task. Many well-educated Americans are unable to put aside ideology and/or have been influenced by the carbon polluters to rationalize away the probable consequences of AGW and the superiority of early over late greenhouse gas emission controls. A NIMBY attitude prevails. The burgeoning world population, geopolitics and the understandable desire for a higher standard of living are likewise substantial barriers to environmental success.

Jared Diamond's book 'Collapse' looks at several societies that were either able or unable to adapt to a changing climate and either survived or vanished over the course of centuries. The implicit comparison between the current global situation and these societies is compelling. For example, the Norse Greenland settlements ended after four centuries with violent death and cannibalism when the ravages of inappropriate agriculture and animal husbandry coupled with inability to adapt to natural climate cooling led to survivalist conflicts and extinction.

We senior citizens have tremendous influence over the decisions our politicians make ... more by whom we vote into office than afterward, when lobbyists enter the stage. The younger generations, who will be most affected by AGW, are unable to enter the process until age 18, at which time a high percentage do not participate. Both of these cohorts and those in between should look to the legacy left by all of us in this Anthropocene Era. Later adaptation to massive buildup of greenhouse gases, a much degraded environment, wars over assets, water shortages, desertification, population dislocations and mass starvation, etc., will be more costly than any disruption caused by early effective intervention into AGW.

Will Earth in some distant time become the Easter Island of the universe, with leaders erecting monuments and prosecuting wars as the civilization dies an environmental death? You have a personal responsibility and, collectively, a considerable say in the matter.