

# Charleston Gazette-Mail

## **If we don't get right on climate change, the rest won't matter**

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September 11, 2016

The world is in turmoil with over 65 million refugees fleeing conflict, tribal wars in the Middle East and Africa, unrest in China and North Korea's nuclear threats. America is plagued with the insane conflicts between conservatives and liberals, democracy is purchased by the wealthiest 1 percent, hate and divisiveness prevails over logic and reason motivating civil unrest and mass murders.

As insurmountable as this is, there is another issue virtually ignored here in America that will eventually negate all other turmoil — climate change. Last year 195 world leaders attended the COP-21st climate summit in Paris and signed an agreement to cut CO2 emissions. President Obama signed the agreement, but our climate-denying Congress was there displaying the message, "Obama can promise anything he wants but it has to be approved by us" that could have potentially killed the agreement.

Now, if climate change were a hoax, why would 195 nations, some very poor, waste their time and money attending 21 major conferences and hundreds of smaller working groups to address climate change? Come on.

Besides, look at the weather related news we see on television. It's worldwide, but what we see in the U.S. are extreme floods, tornadoes, droughts and wildfires plaguing us. Rarely reported is that extreme weather cost the U.S. \$160 billion between 2012-15 and \$8 billion so far in 2016, not counting the recent West Virginia and Louisiana floods. Rarely ever on local television networks, do we hear the word climate change or get news about the massive glacier and polar icecap loss or sea level rise.

In America, the fossil industry with the likes of the Koch Brothers, Exxon and fossil-financed think tanks like the Heartland Institute, the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation, spend millions on disinformation campaigns to confuse the public about climate change. It is their erroneous claim that there is a disagreement among scientists about climate change's reality. Exxon is in court because their own scientists knew about CO2's connection to climate change decades ago but they lied to the public and their shareholders about it.

It is scientifically confirmed that humans burned 2,000 billion tons of carbon since 1850 and it increased the average planetary temperature by 1.2 degrees Celsius which has already increased the number and intensity of weather events, ice melt and sea level rise. Scientists say we dare not

increase the planetary average temperature beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius or we face dire consequences. That's not much wiggle room.

To stay within this boundary, we can only burn around 473 billion tons more carbon, but the world has 2,795 billion tons of carbon in inventory permitted to burn. That's six times more carbon than we can burn which would raise the average planetary temperature by 6 degrees Celsius which would devastate life on this planet.

In spite of this, our future plans are predicated on a fossil-based economy. Congress is trying to undermine the EPA's authority and kill the Clean Power Plan. Pennsylvania's legislators are still supporting fracking for natural gas and pipelines to transport that gas. It has been discovered that methane leaks from natural gas drilling, processing and transporting gas negate any gains from cutting coal consumption.

In just a little over a century, we have increased the carbon content in the atmosphere from 280 parts per million (PPM) to 400 PPM. We can't continue doing this.

Scientists give the world less than 20 years to limit carbon consumption to under 473 billion tons. That's not much time, and it's a formidable task. This is a human emergency. We should be taxing carbon at its source and giving the money to taxpaying citizens to offset the increase in the price of carbon and racing toward a carbon free economy, ditching oil, coal and gas expeditiously. We have to leave carbon in the ground or climate change will be coming to your neighborhood soon.