

THE PRINCETON PACKET



SOLUTIONS By Huck Fairman

United Nations sounds alarm on emissions: Now or never

Instead of falling, greenhouse gas emissions are rising. Most countries, but particularly the United States and China, the two biggest polluters, continue to increase emissions – when all science and scientists have been warning that we all must reduce them, significantly.

The latest United Nations report starkly warns that to stay within relatively safe limits (and the world is already seeing vast weather and environmental repercussions), emissions must decline (not rise) by 7.6% per year.

If this does not happen, the report warns that “we are sleepwalking toward climate catastrophe.” What does that mean? More wild fires, rising seas, melting glaciers (with less fresh water for billions of people), widespread hunger, and millions attempting to migrate – to name but some of the catastrophes ahead.

In the Princeton area, it has been encouraging to see so many more Teslas, and other electric cars on the road, but it is worrisome that so many other drivers are still driving around in gas-guzzling SUVs. Do they think we will be exempt from all the repercussions? Do they think that individual behavior doesn’t matter? With the Trump administration pulling out of the climate accord, we are setting an example for many other countries to ignore the recommended guidelines.

Trump’s denial of climate change would seem to warrant his impeachment or removal from office, as no other policy, or lack of one, will have as profound an impact on the nation. Think of the recent fires, floods, hurricanes, rain events and rising sea levels. Maintaining our economic and physical well-being is at stake.

Another encouraging sign is that so many young

people are speaking out and gathering to express their concern – this from the climate strikes worldwide, to the students demonstrating at the Harvard-Yale football game, to Princeton University students reaching out to industry and government in order to bring about change.

Governor Murphy is initiating a number of helpful policies in New Jersey, including an off-shore wind farm that could generate as much as half of New Jersey’s power needs.

But the vexing situation is that while we as a nation and world know what to do to reduce emissions, we are lacking the political leadership and popular will to effect these changes.

A related problem, noted in the report, is the fact that the world seems to have lost its appetite for international cooperation, as this country has for political cooperation. Many other nations are divided politically, as we are.

However, some Congressional representatives from both parties are working together to increase their numbers and thus improve the likelihood of environmental legislation. But they have a ways to go before achieving the necessary majorities. It is to be hoped that enough representatives, at all levels, follow the policies that California, New Jersey, Massachusetts and a few other states, have initiated. If not, the UN report warns that climate catastrophe will most likely precede the adoption of sensible policies.

The situations on the ground, around the world, are strangely mixed, reflecting, it seems, the ambivalence in populations. In alert nations such as Canada and Norway, plans to reduce emissions are nearing implementation,

while at the same time those two nations are expanding fossil fuel production to be sold abroad.

While a majority of nations signed on to the voluntary climate accord guidelines to reduce emissions, this latest report reveals that almost none have lived up to their pledges, and many countries are in fact going in the other direction. While renewable energy usage is expanding, it is not doing so nearly fast enough.

Unfortunately, the predictions remain what they have been since the notion of the global climate accord came together: our planet has approximately ten years, to roughly 2030, to come together on this and act. That goal is the same despite the acceleration of repercussions from global warming.

Are we, as a species, too flawed in our abilities to sacrifice and cooperate? Much of the world came together during the World War II years, and other nations did during the Cold War, when the threats were more visible and in line with historic, international behaviors, but in our current situation too many people seem unable to grasp the urgency we face, and too few recognize the responsibility we all must take. While locally many are keenly aware, and nationally, polls show that majorities understand the threats and that man is responsible, somehow that has not translated into the action we need.

In addition to reaching out to each other across our nation to act, perhaps the single most effective step we could take is to replace our president, who is thwarting our, and global, efforts to preserve the world we know.

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