

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: The end of the world? (1)

Byline: Peter Wallace

Published Date: 04:20 AM November 28, 2022

Section: opinion

Word Count: 846

Content:

As we know it. In 2014, before the 2015 Paris Agreement, Obama and Xi called climate change “one of the greatest threats facing humanity.” I’d like to suggest it’s the greatest threat. COP27 is over, and I’m going to predict the apocalypse for one reason: politicians.

Politicians who think in two-to-six-year terms for a problem that is decades into the future; who will only spend on results today; who will only decide for their nation (and their reelection), not on helping others; who consider promises equal action; who are uneducated on climatology; who, despite all these weaknesses, are the ones who make the decisions that will determine the fate of the human (and animal) inhabitants of this planet. And those humans are similarly shortsighted.

In the US elections, when critical issues are brought to the fore, the public listed climate change sixth on their list of concerns. Survival of the human race should be number one. The previous five were all on day-to-day issues, affecting them now.

If scientists could make the decisions, the planet would be saved. The evidence is already there. Devastating floods, never before experienced. Everlasting droughts for the longest time ever. Fires destroying areas at a scale new to the world. Cyclones and typhoons becoming ever more destructive. Glaciers that have been there for millions of years, falling into the sea. It rained for the first time in history in Greenland. The world’s seas are up 9.7 centimeters and rising 0.32 cm annually. The world’s temperature is up 1.1 degrees Celsius from preindustrial days. Temperatures have reached the 40s, a level that people struggle to live in, yet we’re heading there, and higher. It’s a well-named “polycrisis,” so many disastrous activities. It looks almost certain now that the scientifically accepted 1.5-degree rise committed in the 2015 Paris Agreement can no longer be attained. It will be higher.

A United Nations report in October found that there is “no credible pathway” to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Current indicators are that the rise could be as high as 2.8 degrees Celsius, which would threaten billions of people. If countries just met their Paris Agreement commitments, the rise would still be an unacceptable 2.4 degrees Celsius.

There is just one small piece of good news. And that was the win of Lula da Silva in Brazil. He has promised to fight the deforestation in the Amazon rainforest that ex-president Jair Bolsonaro allowed to continue, and, if he’d won, would have continued to allow. I’ve never understood why when someone cuts down a tree, they don’t plant another—a simple task that could help save the world. Since they don’t, the carbon dioxide doesn’t get sucked from the air. Germany has offered \$175 million of the initial \$210 million needed to reforest this forest, and also the once massive ones in Indonesia and the Republic of Congo.

Industrial-scale emissions began in 1750. The carbon dioxide emitted stays in the air for thousands of years, so it’s a cumulative effect. China, today, is the largest polluter, but over the centuries, it’s the US that holds the top slot. They are followed by China, Russia, Germany, the UK, Japan, India, France, Canada, and Ukraine—all rich advanced nations, except India whose huge population and uncontrolled use of coal, charcoal, and wood brings them into the picture.

There was another attempt to actually get beyond talk, and do something last week at COP27, getting 200 countries together in Egypt to make serious, firm commitments. More than 120 world leaders attended. But the leader of the world's worst carbon polluter, China, didn't attend. US President Joe Biden didn't make it till the sixth day. Which emphasizes what I said, in the most visible way, in the first paragraphs. Domestic politics is more important than the survival of planet Earth. Biden should have been there on Day One; Xi Jinping, too. Between them, they account for 44 percent of the pollution that is destroying the planet. They have to not only be the biggest cutter of pollution, but also the biggest spender in compensating for it.

The greatest sufferers from an overheated planet are the poorest, smallest polluters. As a group, they only contribute 25 percent of pollution. You couldn't be more unfair than this. The Philippines is the world's most disaster-prone country, according to the World Risk report, with an average of 20 typhoons annually. These will become more destructive as the world's air heats up. Possibly even more frequent.

Just one example of the problem in getting a solution is paying for where the most damage is likely. Ever so many of the most vulnerable countries, and that certainly includes the Philippines, have done the least to overheat the world. Yet must pay a vastly disproportionate amount to counter the likely damage. The countries that created the heating are only just starting to discuss who pays—after 26 prior meetings.

(More next week)

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

By providing an email address. I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.