

Headline: Anything is possible in Age of 'Yolanda'

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The sheer hypocrisy and willful mindlessness of the climate-change deniers in the United States were on full display recently with two record-setting storms besetting that country, and many of them continuing to dismiss the phenomenon as a hoax while trying to find blame elsewhere.

In a widely condemned tweet, right-wing provocateur Ann Coulter plumbed the depths of contemptible thinking by saying: "I don't believe Hurricane 'Harvey' is God's punishment for Houston electing a lesbian mayor. But that is more credible than 'climate change.'"

President Donald Trump, meanwhile, a professed skeptic ("Global warming has been proven to be a canard repeatedly over and over again," he tweeted in 2012 — just one of some 115 dismissive statements he has made on the issue over the years), would describe the fast-developing Hurricane "Irma," coming right after Harvey, as a storm of "absolutely historic destructive potential."

But there was no mention of the likely cause of such increasingly extreme weather patterns, leading French Environment Minister Nicolas Hulot to take a dig at the US president, who had controversially withdrawn his country from the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

Reuters reported: "Asked if the storms might force Trump to rethink his climate change policy, Hulot said: 'What will change in the United States are the federal states, the cities, a whole section of society. I think that is what will make up for the reservations of the American president on the links between cause and effect.'"

But conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh took the cake. The radio host had suggested that talk and warnings about Hurricane Irma was meant not only to "advance this climate change agenda," but also to benefit businesses feeding off a panicked populace stocking up on water, food and other necessities. And then, just before Irma slammed into Florida, Limbaugh announced that he was going off-air, apparently to evacuate his Palm Beach mansion and studio.

Such absurd denials, while showing off the disbelievers for the clods that they are, carry dangerous costs. As meteorologist Al Roker put it in a tweet, "To have @rushlimbaugh suggest the warnings about #Irma are #fake or about profit and to ignore them borders on criminal."

The urge to ignore difficult science in favor of convenient and seemingly less costly ways of living — or, worse, for political point-scoring — eventually extracts a bigger price.

What has emerged, for instance, from the unprecedented storm lashing and flooding that devastated Texas — 60 people dead so far and P180 billion in damage — is that the state appeared to have unwittingly harmed itself with its deliberate lack of zoning standards and land-use planning in favor of unregulated urban sprawl.

According to New York magazine, "Development has overwhelmed the city's World War II-era reservoir system of flood control and consumed the wetlands that absorb excess rainwater."

It's the same with Florida, which has lost much of its marshes and waterways to pell-mell development, but is now projected to be on the frontline of climate change, suffering inundated

coastlines and ever-stronger hurricanes as the planet continues to heat up.

The states of Texas and Florida may be half a world away, but their examples — First World bastions brought to their knees by Nature's wrath — should give Filipinos pause.

Manila has learned to shrug off perennial flooding, but for how much longer?

Texas' laissez-faire urban growth finds a more extreme equivalent in Manila's helter-skelter development; imagine what a truly monstrous superstorm could do to this packed metropolis by the sea — and in the age of Typhoon "Yolanda" and the like, anything is possible.

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Beyond that, when the seas rise, what would happen to the properties and millions of lives directly in the line of fire, as it were? Has anyone in the government actually sat down lately and given a thought to these looming concerns?