

Headline: Politicians can influence the climate

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When Angela Merkel ended her term as prime minister of Germany, she left a legacy that would be a hard act to follow. Armed with a doctorate in quantum chemistry, she investigated the quantum mechanics of gas-particle collisions before she entered politics (Nature, 2022). Because of her sterling academic background, her government generously supported scientific inquiry. She regularly met with active scientists and grounded her policies on scientific evidence. However, her one glaring failure was her lukewarm support for climate action.

Reducing greenhouse gasses and building climate resilience demand political will and concerted action. This reality is seen in the United States, where national policies and actions on climate change gyrate, wildly depending on the occupant of the White House. Thus, the role of decision-makers, especially at the very top, is critical.

Following the elections, the incoming decision-makers will largely determine how far the country will advance (or regress) in capacitating our people against the new climate normal. Recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that humanity must act decisively within this decade, or else we will face a much warmer world.

Our incoming executives and legislatures do not have an easy task. They must wrestle with how to allocate our meager resources to enhance the capacity of our people to cope with stronger typhoons and more variable ENSOs, among others. They will have to decide what form of assistance should be given to the most vulnerable sectors of society. They must learn to work together to lessen conflicting efforts while maximizing synergies.

For example, one of the most compelling approaches to address climate change is through nature-based solutions. There is now increasing recognition that natural ecosystems hold the key to building the resilience of human communities and the environment. Our forests, mangroves, lakes, and oceans help reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere while providing countless services that strengthen the climate resilience of our people.

The role of the scientific community is critical here. The challenge of climate change is unprecedented and full of uncertainties. A great deal of information must be gleaned from computer simulations and projections. We must resist simplistic and knee-jerk reactions. Instead, policymakers must regularly sit with scientists and relevant stakeholders to arrive at a common understanding of the problem and the available solutions.

Hopefully, our new leaders will back up their promises with action. The last thing we need in this time of global warming is more “hot air.”

RODEL LASCO Executive Director OML Center

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