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## **Climate report: Creating a sense of urgency or alarm?**

The cool blue cover of the latest IPCC report on the impacts of climate change belies the rather hot stuff within.

Perhaps taking inspiration from their neon loving Japanese hosts, the report is heavy with reds, greens and yellows.

That is, until you get to the box detailing the human interference with the climate system. Here the IPCC outline "five integrative reasons for concern" summarising key risks across sectors and regions.

These include the risks faced by unique and threatened ecosystems, extreme weather, and the risk of large scale singular events.

First introduced in the third assessment report in 2001, the reasons for concern became well known because of an associated diagram, that became known as the "burning embers".

This chart, showing serious impacts for modest amounts of warming, was controversially dropped from the 2007 assessment, reportedly because some governments found it too alarming.

Now it's back and the hue of the embers has deepened in the intervening period.

To illustrate the fact that time has passed and low levels of warming pose significant risks, the authors have resorted to purple.

This new colour has been added to signify a risk that is "very high".

So for unique and threatened systems, like coral or Arctic ice, once you get slightly above 2C, you're into the purple patch.

This is also the case for the risk described as "distribution of impacts". This means that threats are often unevenly distributed and hurt poor people more.

Above 2C the report warns these uneven distributions get worse, but they don't go purple until 5C of warming.

So is this an alarmist step?

"The colour of the temperature, well I come from Australia and we had to change the colour of our met reporting last year. That in itself also sent a message," said Habiba Gitay from the World Bank, who contributed to the report.

"It adds to the urgency rather than the alarm."

Name removed from report

The issue of alarmism was raised before the meeting by Prof Richard Tol, an economist who has long been a firm favourite of those who question the scale of climate impacts.

Prof Tol has previously published research showing that climate change may have some benefits at lower levels of warming.

Speaking to the BBC, he said he had asked for his name to be removed from the list of drafting authors as he believed the report was overly alarming.

However, he did attend the meeting here in Yokohama and by all accounts made a positive contribution on many issues.

So how do you reconcile the world of purple embers with the one of warming benefits?

According to Dr Chris Field, there will be benefits, but not necessarily along the lines of vineyards in the north of Scotland.

He says that adapting to the threats that are coming down the line is a real challenge, but one that we have no choice but to rise to.

"We can use approaches to managing climate change as a way to build a better world, a world that is more robust, more secure, more vibrant.

"I think climate can help us find the best part of ourselves. I think that there are opportunities to capitalise on it, and one of the things we need to do is open our eyes to the balances.

"If we're dumb, it's a serious, serious problem, and if we are smart it a serious problem, but one that we can manage."

## **Climate Signals, Growing Louder**

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD MARCH 31, 2014, NYTimes.com

Perhaps now the deniers will cease their attacks on the science of climate change, and the American public will, at last, fully accept that global warming is a danger now and an even graver threat to future generations.

On Monday, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a United Nations group that since 1990 has been issuing increasingly grim warnings about the consequences of a warming planet, released its most powerful and sobering assessment so far. Even now, it said, ice caps are melting, droughts and floods are getting worse, coral reefs are dying. And without swift and decisive action to limit greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels and other sources, the world will almost surely face centuries of climbing temperatures, rising seas, species loss and dwindling agricultural yields. The damage will be particularly acute in coastal communities and in low-lying poor countries — like Bangladesh — that are least able to protect themselves.

The report's conclusions mirrored those of a much shorter but no less disturbing report issued two weeks ago by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the world's largest scientific society. Like the panel, the association declared that the world is already feeling the effects of global warming, that the ultimate consequences could be catastrophic, and that the window for effective action is swiftly closing.

The intergovernmental panel's report (a companion report later this month will discuss what governments should do) could carry considerable weight with delegates to next year's climate change summit meeting in Paris, at which the members of the United Nations will again try, after years of futility, to fashion a new global climate treaty. And together, the two reports could build public support for President Obama's efforts to use his executive authority to

limit greenhouse gases, most recently with a plan issued on Friday to reduce methane emissions from landfills, agricultural operations and oil and gas production and distribution.

The methane strategy is one of several weapons in Mr. Obama's broader Climate Action Plan, announced last year, that seeks to reduce emissions by circumventing an obstructionist Congress by aggressively using his executive authority under the Clean Air Act and other statutes. The most important of these are two rules from the Environmental Protection Agency — one already proposed, another in the works — that would regulate emissions from new and existing coal-fired power plants, the largest source of industrial carbon pollution. He has also promised to increase energy efficiency in appliances and buildings, and double renewable energy capacity on public lands by 2020.

The methane abatement plan is a welcome addition to that arsenal. Methane, a product of animal wastes and of decomposing material in landfills, and the main component in natural gas, contributes only about 9 percent of America's greenhouse gas emissions. And natural gas, as a fuel, is much cleaner than coal. But methane is a powerful atmospheric pollutant, 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide, and thus a major driver of global warming.

The burden for fulfilling the president's promise will fall on the E.P.A., which is charged with developing regulations to plug methane leaks in pipelines and in oil and gas production systems. Given everything we now know, public and congressional acceptance of these initiatives should be close to automatic. But, of course, it is not. Senator Mitch McConnell, the leader of the Senate Republicans, seeks to block the coal regulations. Industry groups are complaining in advance about methane regulations.

Some of this may be attributable to public misunderstanding. A poll last year found that one-third of Americans believed that scientists disagreed on whether global warming was happening. These studies suggest virtually no disagreement. The hope among advocates is that the latest show of scientific solidarity will clear up any confusion about the causes and consequences of climate change and the need for action.

## **What YOU Can Do About Climate Change : Divest, Invest, Talk and VOTE (DITV)**

Mary Ellen Harte. Posted: 03/31/2014 3:38 pm EDT

I'm guessing that you and the average people who glance at the headlines about the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (this is a good recap) are going to react at some level with, "Geez, this is such a BIG problem! And I'm so busy -- there is no way I can really do much at all to solve it." Even if you do all those green things (go vegetarian, drive a Prius, insulate your home, etc.) - and especially if you don't. Heading to the next Starbucks and enjoying that coffee while you can, or an equivalent response will probably be your strongest temptation. Just a guess of mine.

Okay then, go grab that cup of comforting java. But as your neurons light up with the first burst of caffeine, consider this: YOU can do something significant. That's right, you, just you. And it's as simple as this: DITV.

First, Divest dirty energy (ie, fossil fuels) from your portfolio --- whoops, what's that wail I hear? It isn't that simple, and you hate to lose money? No, you won't be losing much on this

one - in fact a recent study in Australia, that increasingly hot fossil fuel producer, showed little difference in performance of stock portfolios of those who chose to divest. Fossil fuel investment isn't all it's cracked up to be. And if your broker/money manager/whatever can't figure this one out, it's time to find one that can. A little loss now on your portfolio can translate into a huge win later on, via forestalling further future climate change. If you believe in heaven, think of it as a down payment on a relatively environmental - and economic - future heaven/haven for you and your descendents.

Second, Invest in clean renewable energy, instead of more kids. This is the one that should make you money beyond the energy efficiency investments (more efficient appliances, light bulbs, getting properly insulated, etc.) you've made already. Kids are wonderful (I have one myself) but you're only making their and your future grimmer by producing more in these economically strapped times, rather than investing in creating a cleaner, safer future for the ones you have already, through investing in clean renewable energy. And it requires far less investment.

Putting solar panels on your rooftop (find your options here) is an obvious choice but not the only one. If you pay for energy, then there are clean energy brokers (eg, Ethical Electric, founded by someone who lost a loved one to fossil fuel generated air pollution; Pear Energy) that will, for a few dollars more, make sure that what you pay goes towards buying clean renewable energy for the grid. Then there are the investment opportunities for those with grander assets to use.

Third, get out there and Talk, online and offline, about the three other options with your friends and family. I know, I know, gossip, American idol, the latest sport news, et al all have precedence. But surely you can get acquaintances to open up about how concerned they might be about the extreme weather, and whether their political representatives are doing anything about it? Talk about forming a solar rooftop support group or microgrid in your neighborhood at the next local BBQ? Broach forming local support networks for getting your neighbors who are concerned about their climate future prepped and to the polls in 2014?

That brings us to item four: VOTE. In every election. Really. Because Exxon, BP and the rest of those fossil fuelies who bring all of us that amazing air and water pollution (not to mention extreme weather via climate change) don't want you to. They are literally banking on you not to. It's so much cheaper to buy politicians when nonvoters help them do so.

I shall never forget that poignant moment of honesty when a fossil fuel female executive, clearly anguished because she understood climate change, told me, "Yes, but it's the money - we just can't make as much of it with clean energy!" So poignant - and shortsighted.

Let's not be shortsighted, folks. We CAN save a lot of money now and in the future, for us, our friends and our children, by DITV. It starts with you, just you. Opportunity beckons.

## **Time for real leadership on climate change, energy, national security**

By David M. Slayton and David Titley. Published March 31, 2014. FoxNews.com

The parallels between the political decisions regarding climate change we have made and the decisions that led Europe to World War One are striking – and sobering. The decisions made in 1914 reflected political policies pursued for short-term gains and benefits, coupled with institutional hubris, and a failure to imagine and understand the risks or to learn from recent history. The result was a disaster in many ways; its reverberations continue to shape Europe and indeed the entire world today.

2014 marks the centennial anniversary of the commencement of World War One, 15 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and 10 years since the 9/11 Commission's sobering report on the last great external threat that impacted all Americans.

Today, the Russians are on the move in the Crimea, the U.S. Department of Defense just released their capstone strategic document, and all the while we witness another unprecedented hot summer in Australia, a new Ocean opening in the Arctic and the wettest January on record for England and Wales. Any connection?

The connection is what choices we make and how we make them when confronting complex world security situations where the future seems obvious only in retrospect and the dynamic present can feel overwhelming, what former secretary of state George P. Shultz refers to as a “world awash in change.”

Once again nations face a challenge – climate change -- which, if left unmanaged, has the potential to bring tremendous pain to tens of millions of people, and disrupt seriously the existing economic, political, and security orders of the day.

While we do not know exactly how climate change will evolve, we do know that ignoring climate change is the same as assuming that there will be no change. And that is exceedingly unlikely. And like the leaders on whose watch World War One started, today's climate change policies of denial and delay are ‘supremely dangerous’.

So what to do?

We need to have adequate warning of truly extreme conditions or abrupt, unexpected changes in the world's climate.

Public and private-sector decision-makers require more understandable, more relevant, and more actionable information so they can better balance the risks, needs, and costs of adaptation with their many other competing political and economic concerns and responsibilities.

This goal cannot be achieved without significantly improving our ability to monitor the earth's systems so we can better understand when, why, and how the details of our climate are changing.

It's all about the water. We must sharpen our focus on, and devote greater resources to, the management and efficient use of freshwater, both within national borders and in a cross-border context.

Changes and variations in rainfall frequency, intensity and distribution, with some places drying out and other regions getting wetter, will affect virtually every aspect of our lives.

Closely related to the changes in water supply will be changes and challenges in how we grow our future food. And we must begin to seriously address another water challenge -- the inexorable rise in sea level, which threatens our coastal communities, vital economic and security infrastructure, and the lives of tens of millions of Americans and billions of people worldwide.

Finally, we must attack and solve the root cause of the challenge: unchecked carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses entering the atmosphere.

We must incentivize and transform research and development into reliable and economically viable low to no carbon baseline power generation and transportation fuels; a revenue-neutral carbon tax is a great place to start.

We must think about how we make these new and existing technologies available to, and affordable for, the entire world.

We must seize the opportunity to focus our best minds on this challenge, then develop the needed technologies and drive their costs down so that we can be the world leader in supplying these capabilities to the world. Ubiquitous non-carbon based power and clean water can change the world in a huge way – for the better – and the U.S. can lead the way.

So here we are in 2014, facing uncertainties and choices of enormous consequence, just as the European powers faced their choices in 1914.

The data and projections are laid out in front of us, as they were for them. Will future historians, looking back at the choices we make now, come to a similar conclusion as the 9/11 Commission: “the most important failure was one of imagination”?

Perhaps not – We see signs of hope and progress.

The U.S. Department of Defense in its recently released Quadrennial Defense Review treats climate change in a strategically coherent manner – linking its impacts with other global trends such as population change, growing affluence and globalization.

The three proposals listed above are all feasible and affordable. Our nation, when focused, can perform amazing, nearly miraculous feats. But it requires leadership. We sincerely hope our political leadership remembers those ghosts from history nearly a century ago -- and this time averts the crisis.