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Humans must begin now to reverse climate change

Aug 18, 2021 2

Record heat killed people in the Pacific Northwest. Another town burned to the ground in Western wildfires.

Monsoon rains hit the Colorado Rockies and a California reservoir has dropped too low to push water through its dam's hydroelectric turbines.

Doing whatever it takes to prevent the Earth's atmosphere from cooking human beings must move to the top of every nation's priority list.

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Climate extremes aren't limited to one part of the globe. Neither are its impacts.

While fires in the western United States leave the lives of thousands in ashes, drought in Madagascar leaves a half-million people on the verge of starvation. Historic floods inundate both German and Chinese cities.

"These extremes are something we knew were coming," Texas Tech University climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe told The Washington Post. "The suffering that is here and now is because we have not heeded the warnings sufficiently."

NASA scientist Jim Hansen first brought widespread attention to what he called global warming when he testified before Congress in 1988. For the next three decades, those who profited from fossil fuels and plants that leak carbon dioxide methane into the atmosphere pushed the foolish notion that human activity had nothing to do with climate change.

Sir David Attenborough, whose videos introduced the Earth's natural wonders to generations, now believes humans have so damaged the planet—bringing on climate change with fossil fuels, destroying the oceans with global warming, wrecking habitats and the diversity of life within— that our very survival as a species is at stake.

The United States topped the list of nations that became rich by exploiting the earth. The U.S. should also top the list of nations making the government and economic policy changes necessary to turn this mess around.

Instead, while other nations, which range from China to newly developing nations, focus on sustainability, Congress dithers.

Politicians from across the spectrum and at all levels of government are more concerned about whether making wealthy taxpayers and businesses ante up to help fight climate change might threaten their re-elections. Shame on them.

"The oceans could be healed in a decade," Attenborough told CBS' "60 Minutes," "if we just have the will."

If the United States fixes all of its polluting ways and cleans up its act alone, human beings might still be toast. We must do everything we can anyway.

Surviving climate change will cost trillions, upend cultures, and change almost everything about how humans live on the earth.

The first step toward survival is to stop lying to ourselves about how much time human beings have left if we don't do enough.

"Our View" represents the opinion of the newspaper editorial board, which is made up of members of its board of directors. Remarks may be directed to editorialboard@mtexpress.com.

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