

Our Ocean Backyard  
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Column No. 368  
Climate Deception

Sea level is rising and we're in the way. The shoreline is one of the most important lines on the planet, but after about 8,000 years of stability, which is virtually the entire period of human civilization, the shoreline is moving inland. It's moving towards us because the Earth is getting warmer. As ocean water warms, it expands; and as the planet continues to heat up, ice is melting, also raising the level of the ocean. And all ice melts at 32 degrees Fahrenheit, it doesn't matter if you are a Republican or a Democrat.

For California, sea-level rise, higher temperatures, more droughts and water shortages, more and larger wildland fires, and more concentrated winter rainfall and runoff, are just a few of the effects we will experience more often in the years ahead as the Earth continues to get warmer.

We have witnessed these events becoming more severe and also occurring more frequently. And these occurrences will continue to affect virtually every person living on the planet today, our friends, our children, our grandchildren, as well as future generations to come. Yet there are individuals and corporations who choose to believe or propagate the message that these changes are due to natural processes and who continue to oppose any efforts to turn this unsustainable consumption of fossil fuels around.

Why, with the scorching days and tragic fires, prolonged droughts and water shortages, hurricanes, coastal flooding and erosion, can't these people and corporations see what this future means to them and their own lives and families? When your ocean front house is threatened or flooded with rising sea levels, your favorite ski trip is no longer possible because there isn't enough snow, or your favorite tropical vacation isn't the same without healthy coral reefs for diving, can you begin to see the effects of a warmer planet? In the words of science educator and astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, "The wonderful thing about science is that it's true, whether or not you believe it".

There is no debate here; the jury isn't still out; this is happening now and it's going to get a whole lot worse unless we start taking serious action now. Thirty-four years ago, in the summer of 1988, James Hansen, then the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, first raised an alarm as he testified before the United States Congress that the greenhouse effect was already having recognizable effects on the Earth's climate and that it was only going to get worse.

The next year, just as global leaders were beginning to think seriously about tackling global warming, the National Association of Manufacturers brought together a group of utilities, oil companies, automakers and more, united by one common interest- they wanted to stop climate action. The group that formed had a typically misleading name as organizations like this often do, the Global Climate Coalition. At its peak in 1991, this organization helped lay the foundation for efforts to delay action on climate change for decades to come so their profits could continue to go up. It wouldn't just deny the science, but also argue that shifting away from fossil fuels would harm the economy and disrupt the American way of life. This coalition lobbied key politicians,

developed a major public relations campaign, and gave industry a voice in international climate discussions, all to derail any efforts to limit carbon emissions. Its arguments were so successful that they are still employed today.

A recent investigation into the Global Climate Coalition lays out the untold story of corporate America's earliest efforts to block climate legislation. This study can be used to document that this has been a long-term, corporate objective and that they should be held liable for the damages – that their political actions resulted in the U.S. government not dealing with climate change.

The Global Climate Coalition included major oil corporations like Shell and Chevron, in addition to other companies that had a large stake in keeping the fossil fuel industry alive and well - power companies like Duke Energy, automobile manufacturers including General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, as well as Dow Chemical and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. This coalition wasn't the only organization that sprung up to oppose climate action in the late 1980s, however. There was also the Global Climate Council and the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association, led by Exxon. Both with names that confused and distorted their intent.

The Global Climate Coalition executed a very persuasive public relations campaign that ran for 12 years and achieved enormous success, putting us in the climate crisis we are experiencing today, while the fossil fuel industry continued to make huge profits at our expense.

An important part of their strategy was to emphasize the economic costs of acting on climate change by leaving out the broader context. They were successful in blocking restrictions on carbon emissions by exaggerating upfront costs, which ignored the public health issues as well as the global impacts of a warming world we are suffering from today. Another key component of the Global Climate Coalition's message strategy was to color fossil fuels as a symbol of abundance, a key part of the American way of life. One of their ads showed a photo of a group of smiling children along with the message "Don't risk our economic future, which would force American families to restrict our use of the oil, gasoline, and electricity that heats and cools homes and schools, gets us to our jobs, and runs our factories and businesses". In two weeks, the costs of inaction.