

The Register-Guard

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BOB DOPPELT: Obama should declare a climate emergency

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For The Register-Guard

Published: *Midnight*, July 30

Four governors and President Obama recently issued emergency declarations after millions were left without power in the midst of a sweltering heat wave. The governor of Colorado did the same for counties affected by catastrophic wildfires. The U.S. Department of Agriculture issued its largest disaster declaration ever, covering more than 1,000 counties facing drought — including portions of southeast Oregon.

But the real emergency continues unacknowledged and unabated.

To prevent an increasing number of calamities, the president should declare a national emergency and summon leaders to Washington to craft solutions to the climate crisis.

For decades climate scientists have told us that the continued emission of greenhouse gases, combined with the loss of forests that sequester carbon, would produce more frequent and intense heat waves, windstorms, rainstorms, floods, droughts and other extreme events. We are now paying the piper.

This summer's heat waves have broken thousands of temperature records and cost at least 30 lives. And we ain't seen nothing yet.

Climate scientists say that global temperatures are now almost certain to increase by 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels, and without an immediate aggressive response will likely ascend much higher. As the heat climbs, this year's killer tornadoes, heat waves, floods and wildfires will seem like a walk in the park.

Luckily, the Willamette Valley has avoided damaging extremes so far this year. But humans have changed the Earth's climate, and anything is possible.

We are in the midst of fast-growing interlinked environmental, social and economic crisis. According to the Energy Information Administration, the U.S. is the second-largest energy consumer in the world. Almost 70 percent of our energy comes from petroleum, coal and natural gas. These fossil fuels generate carbon dioxide that contributes to climate heating.

A hotter climate, in turn, produces more weather extremes, which damages property and infrastructure and causes injury, illness, disease and death.

At the same time, a growing world population and rising living standards in developing nations are increasing food consumption. Yet the amount of arable land is being reduced

due a combination of drought and climate heating that is turning some regions that were once good farm and forage land into dust bowls. Rising food prices and increased hunger will result.

To top that off, as the climate heats up, rising sea levels will flood almost a third of the world's farmland while forcing millions of people, from portions of California and Florida to Bangladesh, to flee to higher ground, leaving behind the economic value of their homes and destroying communities.

These developments make clear that the climate emergency is not just another issue to be debated through the normal political process. It is an unprecedented emergency that requires an equally unparalleled non-partisan emergency response.

The president has the authority to declare an emergency if an event threatens human life or the nation's well-being, and if the situation calls for immediate action. The climate emergency clearly meets and exceeds these criteria.

Among other powers, a state of emergency authorizes the president to alert citizens to change their normal behaviors, and to order federal government agencies to coordinate their efforts and implement emergency preparedness plans. These are the powers he must use now.

Standing with the nation's top climate scientists along with local, state and national leaders from the right, center and left, the president should issue an emergency declaration that tells all Americans that our nation — and the world — faces an unequaled crisis that requires immediate changes to reduce emissions and prepare for the effects of climate heating that are now inevitable.

He must order his federal agencies to significantly upgrade and coordinate efforts to reduce emissions and prepare for climate impacts.

Just as importantly, the president should summon elected officials, business executives and civic leaders from every state to Washington for an emergency summit to hammer out an action plan to address the crisis. No one should be allowed to leave the meeting until a strategy is completed to rapidly scale up all known behavioral changes, technologies and policies to dramatically reduce emissions and increase preparedness for climate disruption.

The good news is that we have the know-how and tools to significantly reduce warming and build resilience to climate heating. But the level of deployment is pitiful compared to the scale of the problem.

It is an election year, and an emergency declaration is certain to be dismissed by some as politically impractical or merely as a partisan stunt. But if this year's extreme events tell us anything, it is that we are in the midst of an extraordinary crisis that threatens everyone in our nation, our children and all future generations.

If our nation does not respond now given what we are experiencing, the climate emergency will last for centuries.

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