

~ THE ENVIRONMENT ~

Of all the environmental issues that have arisen in the last few decades, global climate change is by far the most serious. It affects our entire planet and all life on earth. The good news about climate change is that we can do things to counteract it and to lessen the bad effects of it. These will not be easy and will require the people of our country and all nations to pull together.

Climate scientists indicate with a very high level of certainty that our world is getting warmer overall. We will experience greater weather extremes and more severe types of weather events. Reducing the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere can reduce the acceleration of these changes. Climate change and other forms of pollution have a serious effect on living things in our world.

As one who is educated on zoology and the biological and physical sciences I have understanding of how all living things (including homo sapiens) depend on and relate to the environment. The idea of homeostasis is important to understanding this relationship.

Homeostasis is a self-regulating process by which an organism adjusts to the environment to maintain processes and functions that are best for it to stay a live and thrive. This is a constant give and take with the surrounding environment and with other animals and plants to keep life functions within a fairly narrow range. A small example of this is how your body reacts to a warmer environment. You need to keep your body temperature fairly constant for good health. As the temperature around you goes up, you begin to sweat and your body diverts more blood flow to your skin to give off body heat. This cools you and allows you to maintain your body temperature. As your body cools, you stop sweating and blood flow returns to the interior of your body.

In ecosystems like a river or a forest or the ocean or farmland, the animals and plants that exist in that ecosystem adapt and change to maintain their functioning as the environment changes. When the environment changes more than their capacity to adapt, the plant or animal will decline and may die. A decline in function like this may include things like difficulty growing normally, failing to reproduce, decline in crop productivity or complete crop failure. The environmental changes that can do this include not just temperature changes but would also include moisture levels from increased or decreased precipitation, build up of toxic chemicals in the environment, thriving of invasive species, changes in acidity levels, and many other factors. Record numbers of species are threatened or becoming extinct or have been removed from their normal habitat.

An example of the effects of this can be seen in the recent floods in Kentucky. The mountains in that area had been degraded by a type of coal mining in which the top of the mountain is removed. The trees around it had been clear cut. During the mining, pools of toxic slag and water were kept as part of the mining process. When the heavy rains came, there were insufficient trees to absorb and hold the water. The contour of the mountain had changed and water flowed freely down. As the flood water flowed down, it overflowed the slag pools and carried water, mud, and toxic slag into the communities below along with all the debris carried by the flow.

Those communities are now not just water damaged but also are toxic from what the water carried with it all because the environment had been drastically altered. As weather extremes become more common, we need to do a better job of protecting communities at risk.

We need to revise our sources and use of energy in this country. We must get away from fossil fuels as much as possible and as quickly as possible. Our electrical grid needs modernizing and increased capacity to move us toward the use of electricity from renewable and non-carbon based energy sources. Our transportation systems need to be based on electric vehicles and hydrogen powered vehicles. Homes need to be upgraded to be more energy efficient. Heat pumps should be incorporated into HVAC systems. Individuals can add solar and wind generation on their property and be allowed to sell the excess power generated back to the grid.

Many toxic chemicals have been allowed to enter the environment in which we live. Some of these are cancer causing chemicals like glyphosate. Others are so-called forever chemicals that do not easily degrade and keep cycling through our environment. These chemicals get in the soil and enter the food supply. We eat them and get them in our bodies, and some of the chemicals return to the environment by entering the water supply where they cycle back into food sources and into other animals and plants. Research needs to be done to find ways to remove these toxic materials. We also need to change the way that we do things so that these chemicals do not enter the environment in the first place.

Government action can help by encouraging these changes and by removing any unnecessary regulatory barriers to these improvements. Tax dollars should not be used to subsidize fossil fuel companies that are already making record profits. The Department of Defense needs to continue and expand their efforts to reduce carbon output.

Another environmental issue is the availability of clean water for our citizens. Aged infrastructure has threatened clean water supplies in many communities. Changes in patterns of rain and snow have caused shortages. It is the role of government to see to the provision of clean water and the proper handling of waste water. We must stay ahead in managing all of our water resources and infrastructure.

Unfortunately we will experience difficulties even if we do all of these things to counteract global climate change. One of the roles of government will be to help preserve life and safety through these difficult times. Some agricultural land will be lost. Some areas of the country will become unlivable. People will need to migrate to safer areas. Our state might be one of those safer areas to which people migrate.

We need to begin planning for this now. Business as usual in government will not get the job done. The kind of endless partisan bickering that we have seen recently will endanger us all. We need tripartisan rational leadership in government. There needs to be good faith negotiation in the legislature without partisan posturing or grandstanding. This can only be accomplished by re-establishing mutual respect in our dealings with one another and treating public office as a privilege to serve the people rather than as a pathway to personal power and riches.

~ I will bring reason and respect to the legislative process along with sound science based on factual evidence to guide our decision making. Our very lives depend on these decisions. We can no longer afford childish personal attacks and threats of violence in our government. ~

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