

Trust, Truth and Climate change Planet: Herald & Times-Argus (July 10, 2021)

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It is mid-summer and dramatic climate signals can be seen across the globe. The last week of June was a shock to the north-western US when Oregon and Washington had record temperatures as high as 110F. This extreme warm pool extended up into western Canada. Over in the eastern Siberian Arctic, satellite-measured ground surface temperatures were over 100F, continuing to melt the permafrost.

Here in Vermont, severe lightning from clusters of extreme June thunderstorms took out my surge protector and computer (even though switched off), routers, internet and one printer. I had seen the storm coming and had backed up my data; but next time I will switch off the main electrical breaker to try to protect the house.

Some good news is that 56 House Republicans formed a new Conservative Climate Caucus in recognition of the reality of climate change. Good luck to them as they confront the larger number of Republicans who have been bribed by the Fossil Empire to deny climate change. This new group wants to reduce carbon emissions while remaining aligned with the business community. This will be challenging as so many businesses are still focused on short-term profits at the expense of the future of the Earth, which ensures ongoing destruction for life on Earth.

In other good news Canada passed the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act. Canada now has a law to try to ensure the government follows through on promised climate action in a transparent, systematic and holistic way. Many governments make promises they do not keep, so the climate crisis grows.

Green energy businesses in the Northeast all understand that trust is central to developing and deploying new technology. Trust depends on honest, truthful and clear explanations, and the climate crisis needs this for decades.

The COVID crisis has illustrated how trust is key to public communication. Vermont was the first state to reach the key 80% vaccination coverage for those over age 12. Governor Scott and Health Commissioner Dr. Levine and staff held weekly on-air press conferences, explaining how to manage COVID, encouraging vaccination, and outlining the steady progress towards re-opening the state. With open public questioning by reporters, it was clear that the Governor and his staff were telling the truth and could be trusted.

I am stressing this because the critical value of the truth has faded during the last five years, as the webs of lies have grown. In the disaster world of Florida, the Governor has ordered towns to keep using fossil fuels; forbidding them from moving to 100% renewables. Is he really unaware that rising seas will drown the sinking Florida coast? Trapped in his web of lies on COVID vaccination, he also says cruise ships that sail from Florida cannot mandate that all onboard are vaccinated. Some of the cruise industry business may have to leave Florida. Paradoxically the cruise industry contributes to climate change, but these big ships going nowhere can just move on.

It was refreshing to hear the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley bluntly confront the attacks by Republican neo-fascists against the educational efforts by the US military to confront our racist past. He grasps that the truth has to be faced not simply denied as these racist bigots want. Since Gen. Milley is pledged to support US democracy, he also wants to know why there were so many ex-military in the Jan 6 attack on the Capital trying to destroy our democracy.

Academic science communicators keep urging scientists to communicate more – yet large sections of the US community are not listening to scientists. Many are listening to the webs of lies of politicians and the skillful propaganda and advertising from the Fossil Empire and conservative neoliberalism. Oil industries are coming under financial pressures to deal with climate issues, but they are so rich and powerful that they can frame fake solutions within their business as usual.

Scientists are expected to communicate science but not confront the political and economic corruption and lies designed to prevent the public from hearing. It is hard to do otherwise, as scientists are being paid by the political system and are expected to tolerate the corruption. In fact for decades they have been told to stay out of politics. This collusion means many go along for the ride because their funds come from the system, while the Earth is being destroyed for profit by the rich who have the money for deception.

However the living planet is still healthy. With several inches of rain in Vermont, our squash and tomatoes are growing fast and setting fruit to our delight, and our broccoli is heading up quickly. We also have a fantastic crop of poppies and dill that reseed every year. All I have to do is admire their beauty and weed and weed again, which is very grounding.