

Climate Science Is On TV

To the Editor:

John McClaughry's opinion piece, "Is Climate Science Settled? Absolutely Not" (Caledonian-Record, July 26), asks us not to believe the world in front of our eyes.

Heat records in Canada and Siberia are being broken, not by a little, but by a lot. Persistent drought grips farmlands — a factor driving migration from Central America. Unprecedented rains trigger flash floods in Germany and China. Despite recent showers, even Vermont is in near-drought conditions.

Mr. McClaughry cites a book published recently by Steven Koonin to assert that there is great uncertainty about climate science.

Readers should be aware, that is just not so.

More than 95% of climate scientists agree that human activity is priming the planet for catastrophic climate change. (That's a pretty high bar. It's hard to picture 95% of any group agreeing on anything.)

Dr. Koonin is a theoretical physicist and has served distinguished roles in academia and government. However he is NOT a climate scientist.

If anything, the effects and patterns predicted by those who are climate scientists are occurring sooner and more severely than foreseen.

Scientists are typically a conservative bunch. But, as the relatively stable climate that humans have enjoyed for all of recorded history becomes less settled, it doesn't take a radical to see what lies ahead. It is not to be trifled with. Hunger, social instability, mass migrations, conflict, major wars are possible, even likely, scenarios.

"The climate is always changing," some say. But what we're seeing is not that.

Burning fossil fuels has already ratcheted up global carbon dioxide to levels not seen in more than 2 million years, when the planet was far warmer and oceans were a hundred feet higher. We can read the fossil record; it is a fact that cannot be explained away.

Climate science, like all science, continues to evolve and improve. But we know enough now to know we must change course if we are to leave a habitable planet for future generations. We know we must wean civilization off power sources that load the atmosphere with yet more carbon. We also know economic transitions on this scale unleash enormous business and job opportunities.

Challenging consensus — even a 95% consensus — may be a satisfying intellectual exercise. But in this case it undermines the resolve we all need to cope with a gigantic challenge. We would be wiser to face the challenge and seize the opportunities, the sooner the better.

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