

Commentary: Climate change is fueling extreme weather. How do we make a difference?

February 8 2023, by Barbara Willard



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California is digging out from the damage left behind by nine atmospheric rivers that passed in the last few weeks. The storms they

created affected almost every region of the state with extreme flooding, massive mountain snowfall, mud slides, landslides and 20 deaths.

This came after 22 years of drought—the worst drought in 1,200 years—adding to the impact of these extreme rainstorms, with the soil too impacted to absorb the 32 trillion gallons of water that fell from the skies over three weeks.

Like a frog that jumps into a pot of lukewarm water and doesn't notice as the water heats up to a boil, humans are experiencing the devastating effects of climate change catastrophe all around us—but failing to act with the urgency the situation demands.

Climate change won't be a sudden apocalypse but a continuous increase in extreme weather events, human casualties, species loss and other calamities. And climate change doesn't just fuel precipitation episodes like the ones California just suffered through. It brings about drought, wildfires, [heat waves](#) and other [extreme weather events](#).

In the early 2000s, a new branch of climate change science called extreme event attribution was launched by the National Academy of Sciences, with the goal of tracking the likelihood that our warming planet was making weather events not just more common but also more extreme. It has produced compelling evidence that this is the case.

There is broad scientific consensus that climate change increases water vapor in the atmosphere. This results in more powerful storms as they build strength over warming bodies of water, leading to stronger winds and flooding. These are the Category 4 and 5 hurricanes we experience more often. These storms pack a powerful and deadly punch not just on the coast but also inland as they travel over the country.

For decades, we have been told we would experience a tipping point in

climate change. We hear dates like 2050 and 2100 when we will suffer great catastrophes. Icebergs will melt. Manhattan will be submerged under water. The Central Valley of California that supplies 25% of the nation's food will be a desert. We will experience skyrocketing food prices and extreme hunger. The sixth extinction will lead to an immense decrease in biodiversity, causing a loss of natural resources that fuel our capitalist economy.

But climate change is happening now; the cataclysmic scenarios and NASA warnings have already started and will continue to develop. By the time we reach the oft-cited dates of 2050 and 2100, it will be too late.

We are like the creators of a cathedral who may never see it through to its completion. But in this case, it won't be a work of beautiful architecture but a monstrosity that we slowly construct with each increase in carbon dioxide parts per million that we pump into our atmosphere.

This is not to say we aren't working on solutions. We are. We had a big victory in the U.S. in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, with \$65 billion allotted for [clean energy](#) and grid improvement, \$50 billion for climate resilience and weatherization, and \$7.5 billion for electric vehicle charging stations. We passed the Inflation Reduction Act with \$370 billion in clean energy and climate investments.

This has us moving in the right direction but not fast enough. We've got to ramp up our efforts.

So, what can we do? Should we shift toward a plant-based diet? Buy an electric car? Fly less? Yes, we should do all these things.

But our personal actions are not enough. Even more important is to get

political and get engaged. You can become part of the Climate Reality Leadership Corps and spread the word to your community about our current crisis and what we can do. You can help lobby elected officials to pass climate change legislation by joining the Citizens' Climate Lobby. And much of this activism can take place from your own home.

If you are young and want to take to the streets, join the Sunrise Movement, which supports legislation that gets us closer to passage of a Green New Deal. These are the bold actions that will move us away from the danger.

If we are waiting for the apocalypse to happen, we will continue to delay significant action. We march on in the very direction of the nightmare scenarios of which we are warned. We are the frogs in the slowly boiling water. It doesn't have to be this way.

We can shift course. With every legislative action for which you lobby, every phone call you make, every pro-[climate change](#) candidate for whom you volunteer, you help us march in a different direction, away from the danger.

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