

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## OUR VIEW

# A big gulp of things to come

June's genuinely shocking heat wave wasn't by itself proof of global warming, any more than one Texas blizzard disproves it. Single events are weather, not climate. And weather is perfectly capable of being extreme, even without we humans pumping our atmosphere and ocean full of greenhouse gases.

That being said, there is near universal agreement among normally argumentative scientists that heating up Earth's thin protective layer of atmosphere is an accelerating catastrophe. They also agree that human-generated heat pollution made the Pacific Northwest's punishing heat dome a bit worse than it would otherwise have been.

Overall, our region's summers are three degrees warmer on average now than they were in the 1920s. This might not sound like much, but additional heat punching into the West year after year after year is enough to sometimes tip us into deadly wildfires, droughts and heat. Eight hundred and still counting is this heat wave's suspected death toll.

We can't take comfort in assertions that such disasters are only "once in a century" or "every 1,000 years." This summer has only started. More heat certainly lies ahead. Only in October will we know whether we've escaped additional roasting emergencies. One epic heat wave doesn't say anything about global warming. But two in one summer would certainly ramp up concerns. Even another next year or five years from now will start to feel like compelling evidence that time is running out for us to get ahead of the runaway climate train.

Think of the climate as a bell curve, Texas Tech University pro-



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

People searched for creative ways to cool off during the record heat wave in June.

fessor Katharine Hayhoe told the Washington Post, with temperatures distributed according to how common they ought to be. The center of the bell curve may have shifted just three degrees, but the area of the curve now in the extreme zone has increased significantly. A 2017 study published in Science Advances found a 150% increase in deadly heat waves for every nine-tenths of a degree increase in the Fahrenheit temperature.

We can't count on Earth's climate changing in predictable ways. In a system of such gargantuan complexity, there are sure to be factors and feedback loops we don't currently understand. It would be nice to think that maybe some benefits will accrue from our accidental tinkering with the air. For the most part in the past 30 years, the Northwest coast certainly is trending toward weather that can be considered "nice." It's been years since we had a good old 80-inch winter — something we may come to regret if saltwater

begins intruding into our rain-recharged coastal aquifers.

For the nation and planet as a whole, the coming surprises are more likely to be unpleasant than welcome.

Besides contributing to the premature deaths of vulnerable people, one of the heat wave's unwelcome — and unforeseen — consequences was rapid widespread damage to heat-sensitive vegetation. Tender young conifer shoots, landscaping plants, ferns and untold other species came out of those extraordinarily hot days looking in some cases like they had been singed all over by blowtorches. Some damage is likely to be transitory or only cosmetic. However, added to dry recent summers, many trees will be even more susceptible to insect invaders and diseases.

Other harm isn't immediately apparent but is nevertheless consequential. Some local tidal flats, creeks and ponds are likely to have become hot enough to hurt aquatic life, which in turn nor-

mally feeds many creatures further up the food chain. The potential for wildfires has increased throughout the region. Conditions were so hot in some places that asphalt surfaces melted into sticky goo, raising the specter of expensive repairs and toxic runoff. Other heat and drying impacts are bound to emerge. The U.S. Drought Monitor found that more than 93% of the West is in moderate to severe drought.

Even in America's herky-jerky back-and-forth political system, such dangers will certainly mandate a transformation in how we live our lives. All partisan politics aside, pragmatic reality will dictate shifts in everything from how we heat and cool our homes to how much we can continue to rely on fossil-fueled vehicles. The sooner we commit to adapting to such actions, the less unpleasant and costly they are likely to be.

Beyond this, we must all look at our life situations and alter the course of coastal living. This may entail finding heat-tolerant shade trees that can also put up with wet winters. Landowners will be under an increasing obligation to maintain cool stream buffers. As our cars and trucks reach obsolescence, switching to electric will become both necessary and more feasible as the technology improves. Ductless heat pumps, thermal-pane windows, better home insulation and solar panels are all available right now, sometimes with significant tax incentives. There is much we can do.

The heat wave was a big gulp of things to come, even if it can't be convincingly pinned on climate change. Imagine future summers when such events are common. Act accordingly.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Trouble

We are going to be in trouble in the future. We are thinking of scrapping future power plants, due to "warming." China is building more coal power plants.

Our auto companies are coming on line to supply us all with electric cars. Question: Where do we get the electric power to charge all these? Windmills covering the whole country? Solar panels? (In your dreams!)

Our illustrious lawmakers better get out their calculators before it's too late. Maybe China will charge our cars for us?

DICK DARBY  
Astoria

### Do the right thing

I was watching Astoria's patriotic fireworks display this past July 4, when two thoughts occurred to me.

One: The courage the Founding Fathers showed by risking their lives and signing the Declaration of Independence July 4, 1776.

Two: What in the (blank) is taking the U.S. Senate so long to pass the For the People and John Lewis Voting Rights acts? In yours and my country, the right of all eligible citizens to vote is guaranteed in the Constitution.

Today our country apparently needs two more legislative acts to uphold this constitutionally guaranteed right. Say what?

In our 245-year history, America has faced many threats to our democracy and freedoms (9/11, Pearl Harbor, etc.), but this threat to voting may be the most dangerous of all, because it's coming from within our shores.

Officially, it's called voter suppression. Slang translation — some Americans think, for no logical reason, other eligible Americans shouldn't be allowed to vote. What?

To survive, a democracy needs free and fair elections for every eligible citizen. Please don't say, "It's not my vote being suppressed," because if one vote can be suppressed, all votes can be suppressed,



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and that's a dictatorship. Didn't we learn that in World War II?

Voting for these two acts is not courageous, it's putting our democracy first. Courage is the Americans who shed their blood for our democracy and freedoms.

This vote should be a 100 to 0 slam dunk. USA! Any and all senators can be messaged at 202-224-3121.

CARL DOMINEY  
Astoria

### Shudder to think

Who is running our country? You answer back, "Why Joe Biden, who

garnered the most votes ever for a presidential election in our country."

Really? He can barely answer a question from the press corps, even in a relaxed one-question format, without replying in an incoherent manner. If he takes questions at all, he limits it to three or four questions at most, and complains he will get in trouble if he takes any more questions.

This is the most powerful man in the world? I shudder to think what will happen to us in the event of a major crisis. I do not believe he will be in office for another 3.5 years, let alone be able to run for reelection in 2024.

I have questions for you voters who voted for Joe. Did you think it was accept-

able for him, when he campaigned, to mainly stay at his home in Delaware, and not really make any speeches or campaign nationwide?

Did 81 million voters cast a vote for him because he had a D behind his name, or you thought he was a nice man?

So, who is making all the decisions, and giving Joe postcards with answers written to read if he receives any questions? I would like answers to these questions, because whoever is running the country was never elected by the voting citizens of the U.S., and we deserve to know who that person is!

GREG KENNEY  
Astoria