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OPINION

Finding a Common Language on Climate

BY JILL RICHARDSON

If you don't already agree with me on something, odds are I can't convince you I'm right.



There's plenty of science showing that the global climate crisis is already affecting us, that vaccines don't cause autism, and that humans evolved from a common ancestor with apes. Yet many Americans don't believe in man-made climate change, the safety of vaccines, or human evolution.

For the two-thirds of Americans who believe in human-caused climate change, the future is terrifying. If you fall in the other third, try to imagine for a moment how you'd feel if you did believe the planet was warming, ice caps were melting, seas were rising, and weather was getting more extreme.

A new study found a 5 percent that the climate crisis could reach catastrophic levels by 2050, and a smaller

chance — but still a chance — it could wipe out all of humanity.

I'll be honest: I'm scared. Scared enough to seriously consider whether it would be wise or ethical to have children. And I'm frustrated and angry that our country isn't doing enough to prevent the coming crisis.

I don't want to take away anyone's car or air conditioning. I don't want to force anyone to go vegetarian, or limit the number of children Americans can have. There must be a way to decrease pollution and roll back the clock on climate change without compromising our lifestyles in an intolerable way.

But it won't happen while we're all bickering about whether or not the climate crisis is happening in the first place.

I can imagine how this looks to someone who doesn't believe the climate is changing. Some treehugger wants you to turn your life upside down for a made-up climate crisis that isn't even happening. No way.

While the disagreement is most of-

ten on scientific terms, actual scientists don't have any doubt at this point. The question isn't whether the climate is changing, but how fast it's changing and what will happen as a result.

But it's only a small percentage of Americans who are truly scientifically literate. It takes a lot of education — not to mention time and access to academic journals — to actually comb through the literature and find the facts as researchers see them.

Most of us just base our conclusions on media reports of scientific studies or one of Al Gore's movies.

Part of the problem is, perhaps, economic. It's nice to talk about switching to clean energy, but that means jobs in fossil fuel industries would go away. So far, this country hasn't done much in the way of helping people transition to new careers.

No environmentalist wants coal miners or oil workers to be unemployed. We want them to have well-paying, satisfying jobs that allow them to live the

lifestyle they enjoy — without hurting the planet.

The good news is that solar generation alone now employs more people than oil, gas, and coal combined. But in some places, the only alternatives to good coal jobs, for example, may be poorly paid service jobs with lower wages. Perhaps some people would have to move (or else demand their states invest more in renewables).

Ultimately, we need to find a common language to have a discussion, and we need to get serious about providing for anyone whose job will be lost by switching to clean energy. Because the alternative is doing nothing — and then figuring out later how to help people whose homes are under water from sea level rise or increasingly violent hurricanes.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

Cutting Trump a Check from the Treasury

A billion or three for guys like him

BY BOB LORD

What's the largest personal stake a U.S. president has ever had in legislation he signed into law? Whatever it was, it'll be dwarfed by what



Donald Trump's signature will be worth — to himself — if Congress passes his proposed tax plan and puts it on his desk.

If that happens, Trump will be effectively cutting himself a check from the U.S. Treasury for several billion dollars.

Call me cynical, but it seems that's exactly what Trump has in mind. His plan just fits his tax situation — or what we know of it, without access to his tax returns — too perfectly.

The president's tax proposal eliminates two taxes that mostly benefit the wealthy, and cuts a third tax roughly in half. That would bestow a windfall worth billions on the Trump family.

First, there's the elimination of the alternative minimum tax, or AMT.

The AMT applies to taxpayers whose income tax liability otherwise would be reduced excessively by certain deductions, including deductions commonly claimed by real estate owners like Trump. It's like an alternative tax system in which the rates are lower but fewer de-

ductions are allowed.

The one glimpse we've had of Trump's tax returns suggests he stands to benefit massively from the repeal of the AMT. In 2005, Trump's income exceeded \$150 million, but his regular tax liability was just \$5.3 million — that's barely a 3.5 percent tax rate.

But the AMT increased Trump's tax liability that year by over \$31 million. Had Trump's tax plan been in effect in 2005, it would've saved him that \$31 million.

Still, that's chump change in comparison to the tax windfall he hopes to bestow upon himself by cutting the top tax rate on the bulk of his income by more than half, from nearly 40 percent to 15.

We're not talking about the corporate tax rate here. Trump could reap a tidy personal benefit from slashing the corporate income tax too, but the far bigger prize in his plan is its treatment of income from businesses that don't pay corporate taxes.

Under current law, the income of those businesses is taxed to their owners at individual income tax rates. Under Trump's plan, income from those businesses would receive preferential tax treatment, with a maximum tax rate of 15 percent.

That would be the final act in turning our nation's tax policy on its head.

In 1980, before Ronald Reagan's election, the maximum rate on workers' wages — earned income — was less than the maximum rate applicable to all other types

of income except long-term capital gains.

Under Trump's tax plan, the maximum tax rate workers pay, after accounting for employment taxes, will be higher than the rate applicable to any other type of income.

That means no matter how Trump invests his billions — in real estate, bonds, stocks, business ventures, etc. — the income he generates would be taxed at a rate lower than what workers pay on their wages.

Trump's preferential rate for business income is unprecedented. Is it a coincidence that the first politician to propose it just happens to be a real estate magnate with interests in literally hundreds of unincorporated businesses?

The biggest tax windfall Trump hopes

to secure for himself, however, is one he won't live to enjoy. I'm referring to the estate tax, of course — a federal levy on estates worth over \$5.5 million for individuals.

Trump's plan would eliminate that tax, no matter how large the estate. For Trump, that would mean as much as \$1.4 billion on an estate estimated by Forbes at \$3.5 billion.

The bottom line: If Trump's tax plan passes, he'll have secured for himself billions in tax benefits in less than a year as president. Not bad work if you can get it, huh?

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