

# OPINION

## The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition their Government for a redress of grievances.



## Report card on planet’s environment? Not good

**(Editor’s Note:** Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)

The World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report for 2019 indicates that most experts point to environmental problems as being the most serious threats to global stability — just as they found in the previous two years. That report follows on one in October 2018 by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

It said with “high confidence” that at the current rate of greenhouse gas emissions, “global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate.” Avoiding the worst-case consequences would require measures that have “no documented historic precedent.”

As Americans see the evidence of climate-influenced destruction, they’re on edge: Seventy-two percent of those polled late last year considered climate change “important,” a 15-percentage point increase over 2015 — and the news is worse this time around.

2018 was the fourth-hottest year on record; 2015-2017 are the other three. The Arctic experienced its second-warmest year ever. The head of the World Meteorological Organization said: “The 20 warmest years on record have been in the past 22 years. The degree of warming during the past four years has been exceptional, both on land and in the ocean.”

Rising sea levels, according to the IPCC, “will continue beyond 2100 even if global warming is limited to 1.5°C in the 21st century (high confidence). Marine ice sheet instability in Antarctica and/or irreversible loss of the Greenland ice sheet could result in multi-metre rise in sea level over hundreds to thousands of years.”

Antarctica’s enormous ice reserves are melting six times faster now than they were between 1979 and 1989. Glacier melting in

the Himalayas, on which South Asian agriculture is heavily dependent, is proceeding at a very fast pace — so much so that by the end of this century, two-thirds of the glaciers may be gone at current climate change rates, and one-third under the most optimistic climate change scenarios.

Ocean temperatures are the warmest on record, and the warming is occurring at a terrifying pace: 40 to 50 percent faster than the United Nations had previously estimated. That could spell trouble for marine ecosystems, phytoplankton in particular. These

### GUEST VIEWPOINT By Mel Gurtov

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basic food organisms sustain the underwater food chain. If they die off or shift, as is already detectable in changing ocean color, the impact on fisheries will be catastrophic.

Rising seas also threaten water supplies and U.S. military installations. And they can wipe countries off the map. Kiribati, the island group in the southwest Pacific, is a case in point. A nation disappearing due to climate change is something that’s never happened before and, so far, is something people seem unable to imagine.

Planet-wide environmental deterioration is happening faster — much faster — than scientists had anticipated. The kind of deterioration now taking place, involving oceans and glaciers in particular, tell us that life itself is already endangered in many parts of the globe.

And some consequences of climate change, such as rising seas, are irreversible. In addition, resistance to scientific findings and their implications for political, economic and social changes constitutes nothing short of criminal negligence — and people are more aware of and concerned about climate change than ever before.

As challenging and pessimistic as the news

is on the environment, remedies are available now to keep climate change at 1.5°C. In the U.S., the renowned environmentalist Bill McKibben suggests two priority steps: switching immediately away from fossil fuels and protecting cities and coastal areas from ocean inundation.

Strict efficiency standards for industry and autos, and a carbon tax — such as have been enacted in Europe — would significantly reduce carbon emissions.

Then there’s the Green New Deal resolution introduced in the U.S. Congress by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ed Markey. The resolution, which begins by citing the IPCC report, calls for a “10-year national mobilization” to bring carbon emissions down to zero via a combination of renewable energy, infrastructure repairs and community-level projects.

These ideas would require a political miracle to achieve implementing legislation in the U.S. and cause parties to the Paris climate change accord to deepen their commitments. As the IPCC report makes clear, climate change mitigation involves across-the-board and multilevel changes, from sustained international cooperation, including funding the most affected developing countries, to addressing poverty and health care deficits

Political leaders, who always have excuses for ignoring problems that will outlive them, can point to other issues that require their immediate attention. Even the most liberal among them hesitate to embrace the up-front financial costs and social challenges of a serious climate change agenda, though they know full well that the benefits of a green economy — in energy and waste savings and public health, for instance — will outweigh the costs.

If political leaders won’t act, and in some cases won’t even acknowledge the problem, it is hard to imagine that all the wonderful grassroots environmental and energy initiatives underway around the world will be enough to save us and future generations.

### Letters to the Editor Policy

*The Sentinel* welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

### Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn’t follow the above criteria.

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## LETTERS

### LANE COUNTY CONTINUES TO GET IT WRONG

There is a perception that a judges’ ruling is self-validating and beyond reproach. Judges are people who come to the bench with their own biases and are often subject to manipulations by silver-tongued corporate-backed attorneys.

That’s why two judges won’t always agree and could render opposing decisions. As it is said in life *and* with judges, “it’s the luck of the draw.”

And the people of Lane County are experiencing really bad luck in Judge Chantti’s decision (2-11-2019) to deny ballot access to the Right of Local Community Self-government Charter Amendment (RLCSG), which legally authorizes citizens to write and pass laws.

Oh, you thought that the initiative system already did that?

Not in Lane County.

Lincoln County’s aerial spray ban included a RLCSG provision and sailed onto the ballot, begging the question, “What’s going on in Lane?”

Lane courts continue to get it wrong and are complicit in denying the rights of



the people to our own initiative system. These administrative reviews are about procedure, but have been used as an excuse to deny the substance of the law.

Lane courts are blocking an amendment that’s about our right to be decisionmakers in “the democratic process.” Obstacles to the citizen’s initiative process

have been steadily gaining traction ever since it became clear that the citizens intended to use the system to insert ourselves into the decisionmaking process.

People must continue to fight for justice to get this measure on the ballot.

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