

The Climate Change Problem

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Sen. Smith writes about the impact climate change is having on Wisconsin and, more specifically, our rural communities. This is the first in a two-part series about climate change.

MADISON - Cynicism runs rampant in our society and has very dangerous consequences. There are some indisputable facts that we all live with; for instance, we age every day, the earth revolves around the sun and we have 365 days in a year. We all experience this, so there shouldn't be a debate.

So, why are there doubts about climate change? We experience more extreme weather events more often than ever before. We see it and we feel it. These changes affect our lives in many ways and raise questions about our future.

Governor Tony Evers recently appointed me to the Climate Change Task Force to replace recently-retired Sen. Mark Miller (D – Monona). The Task Force is made up of farmers, business leaders, conservationists, tribal leaders and a bipartisan group of state legislators. Since 2019, the Task Force learned how climate change is impacting Wisconsin. From

personal experience and what I've learned so far from the Task Force, it's clear we're heading further down a dangerous road if we don't act quickly and boldly enough on the impending climate crisis.

Many can point to the news of the California wildfires or the freezing temperatures in Texas as examples of climate change. But, there is an accelerating pattern of extreme weather events happening here in Wisconsin that calls on us to realize how serious we should be taking climate change.

Flooding, for example, has become much more frequent and destructive in western Wisconsin in recent years. Higher groundwater levels are a result of our climate's rising temperatures. Rising temperatures in addition to increased rainfall contribute to these flooding disasters. Scientists expect temperatures to get warmer and rainfall events to increase, which will only make flooding more common and more severe in our rural communities.

Extreme weather events caused by climate change have significant economic and public health implications. In the last twenty years, [weather disasters cost Wisconsin \\$100 billion in damages](#). According to the Wisconsin Hazard Mitigation, there is an estimated [\\$40 billion worth](#) of Wisconsin homes and businesses within a 100-year floodplain. Floods are known to ruin farmers' livelihoods, displace families and create significant public safety hazards.



[Floods are the deadliest natural disaster in the United States](#). Floods also pose dangerous long-term health repercussions. Floods carry contaminated groundwater from nearby CAFOs and expose households to mold contamination, which can lead to upper respiratory infections.

We're seeing climate change in our own backyard, and yet many refuse to believe this reality. I believe those who perpetuate the "climate change is a hoax" myth are motivated by profit, especially the very wealthy fossil fuel energy corporations. They fear losing billions if we move toward making responsible, sustainable energy decisions.



It reminds me of the way the tobacco industry paid their own researchers to lie about the fact that their products were killing people. It took decades for scientists and doctors to finally convince enough people that tobacco companies were lying about purposely adding addictive, carcinogenic ingredients just so they could get rich.

What could be the possible motive of climate research scientists who warn us about climate change? It isn't profit. Our public universities, like the University of Wisconsin, house the foremost research facilities and experts in the world. Their motivations are purely professional and driven by science in their discipline. Whether they prove or disprove a theory doesn't change their wealth or status in society. They're motivated to make our world a better place.

According to NASA there's consensus among scientists that climate change is the result of human behavior. Humans are responsible for deforestation and burning fossil fuels at an alarming rate, which have increased CO2 levels and made our planet warmer.

Humans have caused much of the problem, but we're able to find solutions. It starts with admitting our problem and being accountable. Then it's up to us to do our part. We must set aside the short-term need for profit and embrace the long-term need for survival.

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