

Op-Ed: There is No Bright Side of Climate Change

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An opinion entitled “Dire climate change warnings overlook the facts” was published in The Spectrum on June 30th, claiming climate predictions are overly negative, ignore the positive effects, and are made for financial and political purposes. It was based on a single example: fewer people will freeze to death as our climate warms.

But the example is false: the [US Climate and Health Assessment](#) states “The reduction in cold-related deaths is projected to be smaller than the increase in heat-related deaths in most regions.” Even if it was true, it’s a stretch to accuse scientists of unfounded warnings for dishonest purposes. Anyone familiar with science would laugh. The scientific process rewards finding and correcting errors, making conspiracies unsustainable. We see evidence every day that climate scientists have gone too far the other way, being overly conservative in their warnings. And focusing only on the direct impacts of climate change (death from heat or cold) is very misleading. They are tiny compared to the indirect death and suffering caused by economic losses, food and water scarcity, loss of homes, the resulting migration (e.g., Northern Africa, the Middle East, Central American), violent conflict caused by migration and desperation, and the cumulative health and generational poverty issues caused by these conditions. These impacts are imposed by many of us unknowingly or uncaringly on those who are least able to adapt to them. The death and suffering we’ve experienced from a (hopefully) temporary pandemic are miniscule compared to that of unchecked climate change.

This focus on direct temperature-related deaths is another invalid excuse for inaction: first it was “climate change isn’t real”, and then “ok, it’s real, but it’s not caused by humans”, and then “ok, humans are causing it but we can’t do anything about it”, and then “ok, we could fix it but it would cost too much and besides, we can wait”. And now this novel claim that “scientists ignore the bright side of climate change for financial gain”. Searching for the bright side of climate change is just another distraction.

There is an overwhelming consensus on climate change’s causes, effects and solutions. Check NASA, NOAA, the American Academy of Sciences, or any scientific or economics journal, regardless of politics. See the [video series](#) by physicist Dr. Rob Davies at Utah State University. National Geographic’s July 2021 issue features “Beating the Heat,” which describes the high price we’re already paying. If our carbon emissions are not dramatically reduced in the next few years, the effects of climate change on humans will be physically and economically devastating. The effect on Earth’s natural beauty will be even more extreme.

We know how to fix it. The path, supported overwhelmingly by scientists and economists, is centered on the concept of placing a [fee on carbon and returning the revenue equally to all citizens](#). It would reduce regulations and unleash the free market to innovate solutions. Other countries would follow, since the fee would apply to all imports.

Utah is key as a conservative, pragmatic state. Our congressional delegation is starting to move in the right direction. Our state legislature is too. Local action is lagging far behind. Urge your elected representatives to take the critical steps toward a carbon fee/dividend, now, and support them when they do.

The only bright side of climate change is the innovation and economic boom unleashed by solving it. It's time to stop listening to invalid claims and haggling over how much it might cost. The cost of inaction will be disastrous for our children and their children. The cost of action will be paid back with interest.

Tom Butine is a retired aerospace engineer-scientist, volunteering locally as an advocate for environmental conservation and climate action. He has been studying the science of climate change's causes, effects and solutions for many years.