Climate change is real, too: Let’s finally treat it that way

BY THE TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD, LOS ANGELES TIMES
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There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic is the crisis of the moment, and a terribly serious one at that, threatening not only human lives but also the global economy.

But it’s not the only crisis the world is facing, and we ought not, while confronting the immediate menace, disregard the other immense threat looming over us: global warming. Rather, somewhat counterintuitively, we should use the current pandemic to learn some lessons and glean some insights about the other perils we will soon be facing.

We’re not suggesting that climate change contributed to the coronavirus outbreak; there seems to be no direct link, although experts say a warming world could accelerate pandemics of insect-borne diseases (the coronavirus is spread person to person). But the global response to this pandemic does show that the world can come together to confront a shared threat. That could bode well for addressing climate change – if we treat it as seriously.

The pandemic is putting a chokehold on economic activity in hard-hit regions of the world – China, Europe and here in the U.S. When factories and businesses are closed, workers and customers stay home (here in California and in New York, by order of the governors). With few people traveling long distances, airlines slash flights. Sure, people and businesses continue to use energy, but not at the levels they did just a month ago. And that reduction in energy use in turn reduces fossil fuel consumption and emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Little of this will be long-lasting. Once the epidemic subsides, economic activity will resume and so, presumably, will emissions.

But the crisis offers opportunities for change, and we ought to be mindful of them as the pandemic and the economic crisis play out. Businesses are learning how much of their workforce can do their jobs remotely, which offers guidance for how they might operate in the future with a lighter carbon footprint. Consumers are undergoing a forced experiment in changed patterns of shopping and consumption.

Congress and President Trump also are negotiating a series of bailouts and other support packages to help people and businesses survive. They should take this opportunity to press for changes in how some of these industries operate. The airline industry, for instance, should be asked to do more to reduce its carbon emissions, which have soared in recent years and will continue to rise as air travel itself is projected to increase.

One available emissions-reducing alternative is the use of so-called sustainable aviation fuels, including biofuels, but they are more expensive than conventional jet fuel. And airline
companies can be pressured to adopt aggressive plans to replace older, higher-polluting planes. That would be in line with the demand for increased fuel efficiency commitments that the Obama administration attached to its bailout package for the auto industry.

The main imperative for the government is to keep climate policy in mind as it devises a plan to rescue the economy.

But wait, you think. This is the Trump administration, which at best shrugs at the science and ignores global warming. True enough, but Congress also is involved, and it can place climate considerations on the table.

Here’s a good place to start: The government should not be bailing out the oil and gas industry at a time when we should be focusing on expanding production of renewable energy and the infrastructure to store and deliver it.

In recent days, early coronavirus scoffers – including the president – have come around to the reality that this pandemic is a deadly threat and have finally begun taking strong steps to address it. Yet global warming is a larger and longer-lasting threat to humankind.

Maybe accepting the reality of COVID-19 will lead the administration to recognize the reality of climate change and work with Congress to begin addressing it in meaningful ways.

CaliforniaGeo Responds—
Yes. The Corona Virus is the fast moving pandemic with a reasonable-to-expect ending after enough people have been infected and some number die. There are lessons to be learned from this as the article above points out.

Global warming and Climate Change are different than Corona in a couple of respects. We can see them coming and can measure their rate of acceleration. Climate change is headed toward an “infection” of our environment that will make all the anticipated disruptions, costs, and deaths a permanent condition. Corona can run its cycle and then disappear, perhaps permanently. Climate change will remain our fate—forever.

Climate change defense is similar to Corona infections and compound interest. A small bit of action on the front end builds a much better result on the back end. We should be taking steps to rid ourselves of carbon because we know it’s threatening our climate and our lives, plus the lives of generations to follow. Our lack of political will and our refusal to close down for-profit carbon business models who shriek against our intervention are holding us back.

Geo heat pumps are an integral part of the policy move toward Beneficial Electrification, (which preserves our culture without carbon). There is no time to lose in activating every green strategy available. The lives of millions (or billions) depend on that.

—Bill Martin