La. leaders should save Earth from meltdown

Human ingenuity drove major transformations during our shared history. Since the beginning of the Agricultural Revolution, we have figured out how to very effectively grow, harvest, and modify domesticated plants and animals. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, we have figured out how to very effectively turn raw materials into the manufactured goods of modern civilization. These transformations took place organically, and so were not constrained to develop sustainably. The unfortunate consequence is that we humans so effectively convert planetary resources into food, other goods, and their attendant waste products that the Earth is now in meltdown mode. Natural resources have dwindled, the sixth global mass extinction is underway, and the planet is warming.

Meltdown mode is not hyperbole, and we humans are definitely the cause. Figurative meltdown of ecosystem services provided by Earth’s biodiversity results from anthropogenic activities that include habitat destruction, introduction of invasive species, and over-exploitation of natural populations of those organisms that provide us with food and fiber.

According to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services (IPBES; https://www.ipbes.net/), which just this month issued a milestone update, human tolls on land and in the sea have reached extreme levels. The report details how humans have severely altered 40 percent of marine ecosystems, 50 percent of streams and rivers, and 75 percent of the terrestrial environment. Literal meltdown of the Earth’s ice fields is an obvious result of global warming. According to incontrovertible evidence compiled in the most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (https://www.ipcc.ch/), we humans are the primary cause of global warming through our greenhouse gas emissions.

We need a new transformation to turn the tide on the root causes of the global meltdown. Through human ingenuity, we can reverse course on planetary degradation, but to do so will require extraordinary political will by the voting and vocal public, as well as thoughtful legislative action by our elected officials.

As a group, Louisiana’s lawmakers on Capitol Hill are not voting with our best interests for the future in heart nor in mind. Recently, the Climate Action Now Act (H.R. 9) made it through the U.S. House of Representatives, but with little help from our Louisiana congressmen. This bill would simply enforce the international Paris Agreement, signed in 2016, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The only Louisiana representative to vote in favor of the bill was Cedric Richmond, to whom we should be grateful. Louisiana senators will now have an opportunity to do the same.

The Climate Action Now Act, as well as other legislation like it, represents potential for positive, transformative change. Through such legislation, our lawmakers could help transform our stewardship of the Earth toward a sustainable alternative to planetary meltdown.

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