

## INTRODUCTION

**T**here are still people who deny that our climate is changing. The climate, though, just won't cooperate.

The summer of 2012 was the hottest ever for the continental United States. Half of the nation's corn crop was wiped out, along with 60 percent of our pasture land, by the worst drought in half a century. Wildfires scorched nearly nine million acres of forests and fields. Arctic ice melted to its lowest level on record. And carbon levels are rising so rapidly in our oceans that the world's coral reefs, and all they support, have become imperiled, perhaps beyond their ability to ever recover.

We're thus now actually seeing what climate scientists have been warning us of for decades. This is what climate change looks like. This is a calling card from the future we face unless we act now to turn it around. This is a taste of the grim reckoning that lies ahead if we remain on the road to fossil fuel ruin.

Most Americans have gotten the message. 74 percent of the country believes the federal government should regulate greenhouse gases to reduce global warming, according to an August 2012 *Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation* poll that surveyed 3,120 Americans nationwide.

And yet, no matter how hot and bothered the planet and the public seem to be, our political climate remains unmoved. Comprehensive energy and climate legislation failed two years ago in the Democratic-controlled Senate. And the Republican-controlled House of Representatives has voted repeatedly since early 2011 to block efforts to roll back the carbon pollution that is warming our Earth and threatening us all.

There's no basis in science for the political paralysis. Indeed, among those who best understand the science of climate, global warming and its causes are not in doubt.

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“Climate change is occurring, is very likely caused primarily by the emission of greenhouse gases from human activities, and poses significant risks for a range of human and natural systems. Emissions continue to increase, which will result in further change and greater risks. Responding to those risks is a crucial challenge facing the United States and the world today and for many decades to come.”

So sayeth the National Academy of Sciences’ 2011 report, *America’s Climate Choices*. It is important to understand that the National Academy of Sciences was created by the U.S. Congress “to investigate, examine, experiment, and report on any subject of science or art” at the request of our government. It was chartered during the American Civil War, a moment in history when our leaders were serious about needing to understand the bedrock truth about our physical world, as best as can possibly be known. This is our national brain trust.

The climate report pulled together hundreds of peer-reviewed analyses and exhaustive studies. It was developed under the supervision of twenty-two senior scholars in their field from places like Princeton, Georgia Tech, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford, and Duke. There is no more qualified group of experts to pass judgment on known science. There is no more authoritative approach for discerning consensus. And there is no more unassailable assemblage of the intellectual and probative critical mass required to reach a definitive and actionable conclusion.

The action we need is no mystery. We burn, in this country, 800 million gallons of oil every single day. That’s enough to fill the Empire State Building three times. We get 35 percent of our electricity from coal, the single greatest source of the industrial carbon pollution that is wreaking havoc on our climate. We need to invest in energy efficiency, so that we can do more with less. We need to develop wind, solar, and other sources

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of clean, safe, renewable power. We need to cut the carbon emissions from our factories, trucks, and cars. And we need to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, not overnight, but over time.

By doing so, we can strengthen our economy, put our people back to work building the next generation of energy efficient cars, homes and workplaces, and position American companies for success in the growing global market for the environmental and energy solutions of tomorrow. We'll make our country more secure, by reducing our reliance on foreign oil. And we'll create a healthier future for our children by at last addressing the epic scourge of climate change. What other policy strategy offers so much benefit to the country and so much potential for our future?

And yet, despite the imperative to act and the opportunity that taking action would present, we find ourselves at a point where no functional democracy should ever arrive. Our congressional leaders cannot be swayed by empirical science of the highest order. They will not be moved by the will of the people, nor by the public good. They will not act on the plain and immutable truth that is, literally, seared across the heartland.

Why, in heaven's name, not?

John Berger has answered that vexing question in this small but important book. His conclusion will outrage every American with a political conscience, a dedication to our future, or a sense of simple decency.

Our political process has been hijacked by the fossil fuel industry for no higher calling than profits, measured in the scores of billions of dollars each year. The reason our politicians have failed to act—and in so failing, have failed the country—is that the oil, gas and coal companies, along with the electric utilities, cement factories, and industrial incinerator operators that burn fossil fuels, do not want them to act.

These top-line polluters, Berger explains, have too much at stake to risk any action that might result in a reduction of our dependence on fossil fuels. And so they spend hundreds of

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millions of dollars, every year, lobbying our elected officials in Washington and pumping up the campaign coffers of anyone who can be counted on to say no to action on climate change. Climate change denial, in fact, has become a kind of litmus test for roughly half the members of Congress. Stand up for our future, speak out against carbon pollution, tell the truth about what's happening to our climate and putting our future at risk, and a politician flunks the litmus test. Yes, Berger makes clear, it really is that simple.

But there's more to the dark bargain than back room arm-twisting and influence peddling. The fossil fuel industry provides these politicians cover by investing heavily in public deception. They pay second-rate hacks to trump up junk science. They hire Madison Avenue public relations flacks to put together the same kind of slick advertising campaigns the tobacco industry once used to fool customers into believing they weren't killing themselves by smoking. They launch chilling and sometimes debilitating attacks on scientists working to advance the march of knowledge.

The industry's goal isn't to make the public believe climate isn't changing. It's the far simpler task of merely sowing enough doubt to give the fossil fuel allies on Capitol Hill a politically plausible excuse for inaction. Why lose out on fossil fuel funding, after all, and risk being targeted by industry-funded Super PAC attacks, when you can simply shrug your shoulders and tell constituents that more study on the matter is needed?

The strategy has been as successful as it is disgraceful, Berger argues in clear and cogent prose supported by extensive research and documented facts.

Hardly an ideological flame-thrower, Berger is a noted scholar, a graduate of Stanford University with a master's degree in energy and natural resources from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Ph.D. in ecology from the University of California at Davis. He has authored or edited 11 books on climate, energy and natural resources, including an invaluable

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forthcoming 2013 resource, *Climate Peril: The Intelligent Reader's Guide to the Climate Crisis*.

What Berger has done in the current tightly written volume is to rip the veil of respectability off the face of climate denial. This isn't about science. It isn't about fact finding. It isn't about what's best for our children's future. It's the opposite of all that.

Climate denial is an industrial conspiracy to defeat science, refute fact, and make a mockery of any ambition to leave behind a better world for those who follow us. If the effort to block action on climate change continues to succeed, the result will be large and growing swaths of Earth that will be uninhabitable for the next generation, and for all generations to follow.

Berger has laid out the problem before us. The fix is within our grasp.

The fossil fuel industry, powerful as it is, cannot match the concerted voice of the American people. The industry has the right, in this country, and certainly the means, to spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year pressing its case. And we have an obligation to stand up and say what's best for the rest of us. We have the power to bring about change. The time to begin is now.

— John H. Adams,  
Beaverkill, N.Y.  
October, 2012

*John Adams is the founding director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, a national environmental advocacy organization with more than 1.3 million members and supporters nationwide. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2010 in recognition of four decades of service to the nation as a voice for environmental protection. See page 103 for more information.*