

# Bill Kaplan: Devastating climate change and hope

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“July was the hottest month in modern times. Now, August is shaping up to be a month of extremes. In the United States alone, a tropical storm swept across the Southwest, another struck in Texas, Maui burned, and a blistering heat dome sat atop the middle of the country. In India, torrential rains triggered deadly landslides, Morocco and Japan hit new heat records, and southern Europe braced for another scorching heat wave (and deadly fires). ... The fires that raged across the breadth of Canada in July eclipsed annual fire records. In the Florida Keys, sea-surface water temperatures were the hottest on record, climbing into the 90s” (NYT).

Devastating climate change is here. Wisconsin has not escaped unscathed. The harmful smoke from Canadian forest fires drifted south into Wisconsin. Moreover, the recent triple digit heat wave is a harbinger of worse to come. “And, as residents have already seen, warmer temperatures bring more extreme storms that cause flooding, coastal erosion and toxic blue-green algae blooms” (MJS). Climate change threatens the health and well-being of all Wisconsinites, including rural areas. It undermines the farming economy and is an existential threat to farmers.

However, there is hope. A new Washington Post poll concluded: “A majority of Democrats and Republicans say human activity is causing changes to the world’s climate.” Likewise, “62% (of Wisconsinites) worry about climate change and support policies to address it ...” (MJS). And, some Wisconsin conservatives are rising to the occasion. Brandon Scholz, GOP lobbyist and chief of staff to former Wisconsin GOP Representative Scott Klug, wrote a terrific Capital Times op-ed, “Solar can save Wisconsin grocers and their customers.” Some GOP state legislators have introduced legislation to push this forward.

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Importantly, former Wisconsin GOP Governor Tommy Thompson is leading the Wisconsin Conservative Energy Forum (WICEF) to support clean renewable energy. WICEF said: “Our whole idea is to talk to the right-of-center folks and change the debate on the right side of the aisle over wind, solar, renewable energy, electric vehicles, and battery storage. Talk to right-of-center folks about these emerging technologies, and get those on the right side of the aisle to the point where we can start to find common ground again.”

The Wisconsin GOP congressional delegation, including climate change denier Senator Ron Johnson, lag behind Thompson and WICEF. Their relentless opposition to the Democratic-passed Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was shortsighted. The law provides “a bevy of tax credits to incentivize wind, solar and other renewable power sources, while helping people purchase new or used electric vehicles and install energy-efficient heating and cooling systems (heat pumps) in their homes” (Washington Post). Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin said: “The legislation will make historic investments in American clean energy manufacturing.” Moreover, the IRA provides “more funding for farming conservation programs (and) provides loan, financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to help kickstart renewable energy ... ” (MJS).

Baldwin, Scholz, Thompson and WICEF lead, while Ron Johnson and other flat-earthers bury their heads in the sand.

*—Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.*