

CONFRONTING THE REALITY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

I think anything we do is going to be too little, too late.

It got so hot in downtown Los Angeles the other day that the thermometer broke. The National Weather Service's device hit 113 degrees at about noon (the highest temp ever recorded in LA), then just quit.

Climate change hawks were quick to seize on this as evidence that global warming is revving up and we ought to do something about it before it's too late.

Climate change doves were just as quick to point out that Los Angeles had recorded near-record seasonal lows just the week before and that the 113-degree day was an aberration in an otherwise cool summer. Global warming is a myth, they say.

They're both wrong.

The fact that it's extremely hot on a given summer day in Los Angeles or unusually cold on a winter day in New York is irrelevant to the question of climate change. You have to look at the big picture: If the earth isn't getting warmer, it's certainly doing a marvelous imitation.

For example:

- 2010 is on track to be the warmest year, worldwide, in recorded history.
- Polar ice continues to disappear at a rate that is alarming to scientists who track that kind of thing.
- Russia is suffering its most severe drought in 130 years, with the attendant wildfires that come with dry weather. The same is true for Australia and the American southwest. Southern California isn't faring much better.
- Extreme weather events, like floods, wind storms, etc., which can be expected to increase with climate change, are indeed increasing both in number and intensity. The floods in Pakistan are only the most dramatic example of weather-driven disasters. New England, Nashville, Arkansas, and Oklahoma have also suffered through floods this year.

The list goes on. While none of that is proof of climate change, the evidence is certainly piling up, high enough to convince all but a very few climate scientists that warming is occurring and at an alarming rate.

And yet there remain skeptics on the issue, not all of them crazy or in the pocket of oil, gas or coal-related industries.

Perhaps the most eminent of these is Freeman Dyson, a world-renowned physicist and liberal intellectual, who just isn't buying what Al Gore, among others, is selling.

"All this fuss about global warming is grossly exaggerated," the 86-year-old says. "Most of the evolution of life occurred on a planet substantially warmer than it is now."

More carbon dioxide in our atmosphere might actually be a good thing, he contends, because it feeds plants' growth. And as far as warming goes, it could very well be forestalling a coming Ice Age.

He thinks that scientists who predict that climate change will produce the Apocalypse rely too heavily on faulty computer models that rely on "lousy science."

Well, maybe. I side with the people who study the problem full-time. They have reached consensus on the existence and dangers of climate change.

What makes sense to me, however, (and a sad sense it is) is the calculation of engineer-inventor Saul Griffith. In an [interview](#) with David Owen of *The New Yorker* magazine, he calculated that if we wanted to limit climate change to a manageable two degrees Celsius we would have to replace our current energy sources by building the following:

- A hundred square meters of new solar cells, 50 square meters of solar-thermal reflectors and one Olympic pool's volume of genetically engineered algae every second for the next 25 years.
- One 300-foot diameter wind turbine every five minutes, a 100-megawatt steam turbine every eight hours and a large nuclear power plant every week.

In other words, it ain't gonna happen.

I happen to agree with that. I think anything we do is going to be too little, too late.

It's time to get the band on stage and have them strike up "Nearer My God to Thee." It's comforting.