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Leadership Lessons from Past Global Challenges: Managing the Climate Change Challenge Threatening Sustainable Development

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Editorial-Article

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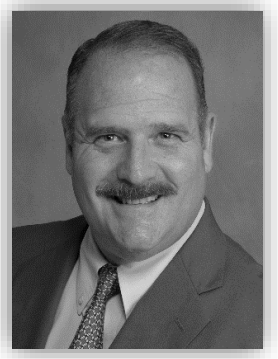

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Abstract

On June 5, 2024, Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, stated in open forum quite unequivocally: "We are playing Russian roulette with our planet. We need an exit ramp off the highway to climate hell. Indeed, climate change is a global challenge to sustainable development." And an applied solution to this global challenge is a common interest point for all. This viewpoint article presents the key leadership lessons from past global challenges in order to better combat the climate change crisis, alleviate the suffering of those immediately affected, and build a more stable future for all.

Introduction

The nightmares increase in Australia with higher temperatures, extreme droughts, and flash floods and fires. This is a phenomenon that appears to include California recently as well – from the atmospheric rivers in late 2023/early 2024 to the more recent San Joaquin wildfires and statewide heat dome. California is appearing to resemble Sydney with heat waves, unpredictable rainfall, and seasonal abnormalities. The similarities between what happened in the Sydney Forest Fires in 2020 and what forest fires happened in the San Gabriel Mountains in California were extremely parallel in nature (Silverstein, 2019; Jenkins, 2021; Vetter, 2022). In November 2023, James Hansen, a globally-recognized climate action scientist and the director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, said: “In the next several months, we’re going to go well above 1.5C [Celsius] on a 12-month average. … For the rest of this decade, the average is going to be at least 1.5.” Similarly, David Attenborough, an English broadcaster, and natural historian, also described the climate change crisis as “the biggest threat modern humans have ever faced.”

Former President Barack Obama’s visit to Australia in 2014 to attend the G20 Summit and his inspirational speech at the University of Queensland was a step forward for the two territories to work on climate change together, breaking down barriers and developing more scientific and practical cooperation in this area. Perhaps if this collaboration could increase,

then the problems associated with this threat would be mitigated. And now, President Joe Biden's decision to increase fossil fuel exports to European countries must not ignore the super-challenge of climate change that threatens humanity. Collaboration is necessary and can contribute to sustainable development and provide a better future for all territories affected by climate change.

Leadership Lessons from Past Global Challenges

The financial benefits of investing in fossil fuels and the preference for short-term profits over longer-term benefits are uniquely consequential; meanwhile, our planet is suffocating. As researchers, ostensibly the short-term financial benefits are not more important than the challenges that threaten human survival. Indeed, capitalists and politicians have not yet realized the importance, seriousness, and urgency of this threat. We must care about the land as a home for survival, development, and even financial gain for all its inhabitants. To achieve this intention, political will is also necessary to overcome the challenge of climate change. Guaranteeing broad cooperation between universities, institutions, and organizations active in the field of environment and climate change necessitates more grants and funding. This further collaboration between politicians, universities, and climate change-related institutions could lead to technological innovations. These technological innovations could then create opportunities to further replace fossil fuels with clean energy alternatives such as fusion-based nuclear power and green hydrogen energy. Political will must occur to address this existential threat. The key leadership lessons of past global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war on Ukraine are necessary to address the current climate change crisis that threatens sustainable development. This editorial-article highlights several of these key lessons.

Lesson #1: Heed Expert Opinions

Global crises have provided us examples and given us tools that might be used to help address the ravages of climate change more effectively. People view fossil fuel production and usage differently since the Russian Federation — one of the world's largest oil and gas producers and former providers of same to many European communities — invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Universally, many people, now understand that renewable energy must play a critical role in their respective countries' energy landscapes. We hope that many world political and business leaders have learned from the COVID-19 crisis, a pandemic that killed millions of people worldwide,,,that we must carefully heed expert opinions. For instance, in the U.S., one of the most important statements President Biden made in his speech at the National Governors Association's Winter Meeting on February 25, 2021, was that "He would be willing to take the vaccine publicly as soon as Doctor Fauci[1] says it's safe, in an effort to boost public confidence." Now it is time to implement this leadership lesson in battling the climate change crisis and make more and better use of climate change experts to help guide macro-political and economic decisions. Expert opinions can prevent errant policies and limit

[1] "Doctor Fauci" refers to Cornell University-educated Anthony Stephen Fauci, an American physician-scientist and immunologist who served as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), as a staff physician with the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and as the chief medical advisor to President Joe Biden from 2021 to 2022. According to NIH records, he is also a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom – the highest civilian award in the U.S. – for his work on AIDS. Fauci served the American public health sector in excess of 50 years, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. While he served under former President Donald Trump as one of the lead members of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, his advice was frequently contradicted by Trump, but after Biden took office, Fauci began serving as one of the lead members of the White House COVID-19 Response Team and as Biden's chief medical advisor.

catastrophic ambivalence steering the world to extinction. For example, Germany has heeded expert opinions, and now the outlook for renewable energy use has improved and is encouraging.[2] Optimistically, it can be said that we are now on the path of accepting renewable energy sources and the use of these sources seems much more economical compared to fossil-fuel-based energy types.

Lesson #2: Achieve Greater Sensitivity and Awareness

As we face the energy crisis today, sensitivity to environmental change has spearheaded multi-faceted reactions. COVID-19 revealed to global political and business leaders the importance of the "Butterfly Effect" which showed how a seemingly small phenomenon could have a profound effect on political and economic systems around the world (Carlin, 2021; Porterfield, 2022). Global leaders are now aligning with climate remediation and adaptation policies and objectives to begin to counter the harmful effects of a changing planet on their respective constituencies. They must become more sensitive than ever to the consequences of the global super-crisis of climate change impacting their companies and the global economy.

Lesson #3: Focus on Long-Term Consequences

Focusing on long-term consequences rather than short-term gains is another important lesson that is better understood today in the energy crisis. Many countries, especially European countries as previously mentioned, have come to terms with the crisis, realizing the long-term dangers of dependence on Russian oil and gas through international cooperation and greater investment in alternative energies. Expanding international cooperation between countries and companies is also needed to expand investments in emerging and cleaner technologies. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is recognized as a critical global framework, fostering international collaboration to address the borderless issue of climate change, often incorporating feedback from business, governmental, and academic leaders. Through its various agreements, the UNFCCC provides a platform for nations to work collectively to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapt to — and mitigate wherever possible — the changing climate, emphasizing the crucial role of global cooperation in fighting this multifaceted challenge.

Now, political leaders should also consider United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) #s7 ("Affordable and Clean Energy") and 9 ("Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure"), which clearly indicate that leaders should formulate and develop agreements to promote and enable the production of renewable energy sources. To achieve these goals, world leaders can play an important role to facilitate and expedite the transition to electric cars and ban combustion-based vehicles. Policies such as the expansion of battery-charging centers for electric cars, especially in the State of California — one of the top 5 states in the U.S. most affected by climate change[3] or incentive policies for families who replace their gas-powered cars with EVs as President Biden has done with the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, can make the role of future U.S. presidents for lowering CO2 levels more prominent. According to the Dow Jones' Market Watch, in May of 2024 it was reported that the gap in price between electric and conventional automobiles was slowly closing. The average transaction price for

[2] According to the International Trade Commission (ITC), while renewable resources have actually dropped over the last 2 years, Germany has had to fill a tremendous void without the stable flow of oil and gas from the Russian Federation. And as reported by Reuters in early 2024, a "record 56% of Germany's electricity was produced from clean sources in 2023, and total power sector emissions tumbled more than 20% from 2022's levels to the lowest in decades… "

[3] According to the U.S. Government's Fifth National Climate Assessment released in 2023.

electric cars was $55,242 in April, 2024, vs. gas-powered vehicles at $44,989. While Tesla (TSLA) contributed to a substantial drop in EV prices as it cut prices in 2023 after it announced its below $30,000-Model 2 to be released in 2025, its CEO Elon Musk has now ended that strategy. And with both the EU and the US slapping hefty import taxes on a more affordable Chinese brand — BYD — one wonders when mass marketing and sales will become more feasible.

To meet SDGs goals 7 and 9, there is also another burden placed upon the earth which is the need for urgent action to fight deforestation and soil erosion. California and Canada have lost millions of acres of forested land in recent years, and soil erosion, especially in US coastal areas, is occurring at an alarming rate. Reforestation and the increase of scientific and academic cooperation from scholars are providing alternatives. During the Jair Bolsonaro administration, large swaths of the Brazilian rainforest – the "lungs of the world" – were destroyed to growth crops to feed cattle to bolster its meat exports – primarily to the US and China. Now, Brazil, is starting to reverse that process and plant-based meat substitutes are gaining traction worldwide.

In Conclusion

Without question, anthropogenic-caused climate change has presented an existential threat to all parts of the world. Let's band together our leaders and hammer out a protocol, using the lessons of the past, to set the world on a better path.

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