



PERSPECTIVES

by **Rinaldo S. Brutoco**



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Earth Day – Backwards and Forwards *Looking at the Ebbs and Flows of Environmental Wins*

Wow! Hard to believe we've celebrated fifty-one Earth Days and the environmental battles we are fighting are worse than ever. Looking back, we delight in the history of Earth Day, in part catalyzed by the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969. Earth Day was officially launched in 1970 by Senator Gaylord Nelson and Congressman Pete McCloskey, supported by National Director Denis Hayes managing a national staff. McCloskey's involvement was lucky for Santa Barbara, as that brought our own environmental pioneer, Marc McGinnes to town. Thank you once again Marc for the seminal role you played in co-creating the National Environmental Policy Act, and for helping launch all things environmental here, from launching the first-ever environmental studies program right here at UCSB as your role in co-creating the national environmental agenda that led to the existence of Earth Day.

Originally planned as a nationwide environmental "teach-in," the idea proved unworkable at that time for a variety of good reasons. It was first dubbed as, "Environmental Rights Day," in honor of the first anniversary of the Santa Barbara blowout, and set for a proclamation of the Declaration of Environmental Rights on January 28, 1970. Fortunately, Denis and his team regrouped, renamed the effort "Earth Day," and went on to successfully organize 20 million people taking to the streets on April 22, 1970—the largest single-day protest in American history.

The biosphere had found its champions, including the United Auto Workers (Denis said Earth Day would not have happened if not for their financial and organizational support), and all we needed to do was follow their lead. It was clear we needed to heal the environmental damage we had done and restore the biosphere to a balance healthy for plants, animals, and humans! What could go wrong with such an energetic, thoughtful, well-organized effort? The answer: everything.

Fossil fuel companies saw the threat and dramatically upped their financial support for politicians who could slow down the juggernaut they saw jeopardizing their profits. Sad to say, many in the general business community supported this environmental "push back," working to impede government regulations that might also affect, in ways then unseen, the profits gained from raping the planet. With politicians and business thus arrayed against further environmental progress, we spiraled from a damaged biosphere to one so destabilized that it likely will not continue supporting human civilization as we know it by mid-century.

That's a tragically wide miss of the lofty goals set in 1970, under Republican President Nixon. It wasn't a partisan issue then, but it has become one today precisely because the politics of making Earth a safe place to live has become a "wedge" issue. Go figure. You might think only the most craven politicians would be willing to send humanity to sink in a sea of climate change destruction in pursuit of a "wedge issue" that would appeal to a shrinking base. And you'd be right. Sadly, that 35 percent of the political base has been enough, up until now, to arrest serious attempts at restoring the biosphere to health.

Fortunately, the general business community has seen where this insanity leads and has embraced biosphere restoration and relief from climate change as one of its very highest goals. So has the Pentagon. For several years now, the US Pentagon has listed climate change as the number one security threat facing our nation.

Looking back, according to ABC News, one billion people participated in Earth Day actions on the 40th anniversary in 2010. In April 2020, as the world grappled with the initial months of lockdowns, at least 100 million people in 192 countries took action to honor Earth Day's 50th anniversary. As the Union of Concerned Scientists observed, this made it the largest

online mass mobilization in history. Even President Biden has become a climate champion and is finally telling the truth. He observed at last week's Leaders Summit on Climate, that the evidence is clear; the science is irrefutable; no nation on earth can avoid the consequences of a planet rapidly becoming unlivable for humans.

If you believe the largest collection of climate scientists in the world, (the 2,000 folks of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or "IPCC") as any rational person should, we have less than nine years to turn climate change around or suffer incalculable consequences. Just last week the massive reinsurance company, Swiss Re, warned up to approximately \$25 trillion would be lost to the world economy by mid-century if major corrective action isn't immediately taken. That's something to think about.

Unfortunately, that number is too optimistic—the damage will be greater, and it is arriving already. Climate change destruction is all around us from the forest fires and droughts of California to the massive tornadoes hitting the Gulf States and the Southeast to the hurricanes afflicting Florida. Each year the average global temperature goes up, the billions lost in destruction goes up. The loss of life due to climate change also mounts each year. In fact, international observers believe there were over 6,000,000 climate refugees last year alone with heavy flows toward Europe continuing from Africa, and increased flows to the US from Central America.

If you want to look forward to the future, look at Saudi Arabia! Yes, Saudi Arabia has formally announced that it must develop a new fuel commodity to replace all the oil they acknowledge will be less in demand. Looking forward, they know the future is in green hydrogen. The Saudi government has announced the creation of a new city in the desert, Neom, which is being constructed solely to build and manage a remarkable new green hydrogen production facility to produce 650 metric tonnes of liquid hydrogen a day from a massive solar power array being constructed as we write. The project is a joint venture of Air Products of Pennsylvania, the Saudi government, and a company funded by the Saudi

Sovereign Wealth Fund (ACWA Power). The arrangement also provides for the green fuel produced there to be shipped to Hamburg, Germany for European distribution.

Stay tuned next week to read more about green hydrogen, all the plants being built or under active discussion around the world, and why other states in the Middle East also believe the time is NOW to convert power off fossil fuel and deliver the Hydrogen Economy. Amazing!

Published in the 4/29/21 edition of the Montecito Journal

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