

Grasping climate as a bridge issue can lead to bipartisan solutions



Heavy rain flooded the Graveyard Point neighborhood in Austin on Oct 19. [AMANDA VOISARD/AMERICAN STATESMAN]

BY EMILY NORTHROP

How does climate change affect U.S. House District 31? That is what a team of Citizens' Climate Lobby volunteers from Williamson County wanted to emphasize in our recent meeting in Representative John Carter's Washington office. Here is how we made global warming a local issue: District 31 includes Fort Hood. Given climate change, soldiers can anticipate more deployments.

The Department of Defense expects global warming to increase political and economic instability around the world and describes it as a "threat to national security." Case in point, we currently have troops in Syria, a conflict fed by an unprecedented drought.

District residents pay taxes, and climate change has cost taxpayers over \$350 billion in the last 10 years. By 2060 the bill will reach \$44 trillion. We'll pay more for climate adaptation, hopefully to include the \$15 billion sea wall Texas has requested from the federal government. We'll also face the growing cost of assisting with recovery from weather events made more extreme by our new climate. Since 2017 the U.S. has suffered 29 weather-related disasters with costs exceeding \$1 billion, including our \$125 billion hurricane Harvey.

Local extreme precipitation is becoming more common. District #31 extends into Austin, where following the recent severe flooding some constituents had to endure the weeklong water boil. In Georgetown four people were rescued after the San Gabriel River flooded and two were taken to the hospital. Homes were evacuated and more than 60 low water crossings were closed in Williamson County. Some infrastructure was damaged, a local example of a climate recovery expense.

By 2100 Georgetown's average summer high is expected to increase from 94 degrees to 104 degrees.

This will be unsafe, especially for those among us without air conditioning, vexing for most others, and it will hurt our productivity.

The 2018 drought put Williamson and Bell counties on the USDA list of primary natural disaster areas. A Federal Reserve study projects that continued warming is going to harm the U.S. economy, especially in the South, including Texas.

According to my Georgetown insurance agent some local home insurance premiums are rising 15-20 percent annually, pushed up by the increased frequency of extreme weather, including hail storms.

West Nile virus was detected in a mosquito collected within a half mile of my Georgetown home. Our evolving climate makes the neighborhood more hospitable to the virus.

Georgetown salamanders, which live only in and around Georgetown, are listed by the EPA as a threatened species. They are imperiled by drought and flooding.

In the past three months our nation has suffered hurricanes Florence and Michael, and the terrifying, heart-breaking fires in California. We in District 31 are deeply pained when lives are lost or shattered due to climate cruelties.

The unfolding local, national, and global impacts of our disrupted climate have affected District 31 attitudes. According to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 68 percent of us agree that fossil fuel companies should be required to pay a carbon tax.

The Citizens' Climate Lobby also believes that government should charge fossil fuel producers for their carbon emissions, and we advocate that the funds be advanced each month to households on an equal basis. This market-based policy is effective at reducing emissions, creates jobs, and is good for people's health and our income security.

The sea level rises on red and blue districts alike, and forest fires ravage people of all political persuasions. It is both reasonable and imperative that our elected officials in Washington grasp climate as a bridge issue and achieve a bipartisan legislative success. Please urge them to act.

Northrop, of Georgetown, is with Citizens' Climate Lobby.