

Considering the relationship between the Covid 19 pandemic and climate chaos

The world has turned upside down. Two months ago, we were having comfortably lively seminar discussions about impending climate chaos. Then the covid 19 pandemic descended on our world and our country, creating medical and economic chaos. There is no evidence the emergence of this virus was climate-change induced. Still, there may be lessons to be learned from watching how our political, economic, and social institutions respond.

Our society was unprepared. You have all surely read the articles: medical facilities are without the equipment to treat those infected, and often without even the most basic of protective equipment for health care workers. The economy here and abroad is crashing, both from the direct results of the virus and from efforts to contain it. Much of our country and much of the world has come to a standstill as we shelter-in-place hoping to avoid infection.

The economic crash has brought on a reduction in regional air pollution, and presumably in greenhouse gas emissions. But now we are faced with terrible consequences whichever path the pandemic drags us to – if our health systems and overall economy recover quickly, then climate change hasn't gone away, it's just been in recess. Or, if the infections linger, our economy and large chunks of our society will be seriously if not mortally wounded.

Not to detract from the grave consequences of this current pandemic, it may be a minor shadow of the future. This is, in many ways, simpler and less intense than epidemics that that could come with climate change. Dengue, Malaria, Cholera, and Ebola all have higher death rates, particularly when inadequately treated. And that, along with adequate prevention, is the key. The US response to Covid 19 is a mess because of a long series of flawed political decisions, and because of a striking lack of federal leadership. We are proving that even a hint of governmental chaos can lead to grave results. Just imagine a pandemic after a series of climate related shocks (medical and other) have emasculated all levels of our government.

Ironically, just when attention to climate action was growing and calls for real change in our social institutions getting louder, the economic disruptions from Covid 19 have put the governments of the world into a mode of defending the existing social and economic systems. It is these systems which have brought us climate change, and which need to be overhauled. But any movement toward that has been set aside in favor of protection jobs and corporations, and investors, etc.

In addition, the pandemic and our response to it may materially interfere with desperately needed efforts to adapt and respond to climate change impacts. Hurricanes, intensified by warmer oceans, may slam into pandemic hot zones and add unimaginable misery to already awful situations. The same with wildfires, and winter flooding. All of these, along with regional droughts and famines, force people to migrate and congregate, exacerbating the spread of diseases.

This is just a quick sampler of what we might discuss. There are many ways we can do that, but the one I have available is using my blog (climateunderground.net) as a rudimentary chat site. On it I have posted the six background essays to our climate chaos seminar series. I will post this piece as well. These most recent seven posts are all from this series of essays, but if other works eventually intervene, you can go to “categories” on the upper right of my home page and click on “Living in a Time of Climate Chaos”. This will bring up the entire essay series.

As far as chatting, you can click on “leave a comment” at the bottom of each essay -- that's the place for a comment for that particular work. If you want to comment on a comment,

just click on it and leave your work – it will show up as a slightly indented section, which will identify it as a comment/comment.

I realize this might be a somewhat cumbersome approach to discussion. Other than it being the only way I can think of within my limited technical abilities, it does have the advantage of allowing us to consider out responses and then wow each other with our literary gymnastics.

Finally, for any of you who want to offer up your own independent thoughts, please send them to me via email and I will post them to the blog under your name. I expect to be creating mini essays of my own as I go about my farm work then posting them to the blog, but I welcome outside authors.

That's all for now. Stay safe, keep your distance, wash your hands, and brush your teeth.

Respectfully,

Allen Edwards