

VIEWPOINTS

No sunny forecast for climate change policies

Glancing out our home's kitchen window while pouring myself a cup of coffee, I couldn't help but note what a difference a year (or two) makes.

Our lawn is lush and green. In the middle of July. That wasn't the case two years ago, when southeastern South Dakota was gripped by a drought.

Yep, the summer of 2012 is responsible for pretty much killing off a large portion of my lawn -- a big patch that runs along the north side of our house. That area is green now, thanks to crabgrass and other weeds that decided to take root there.

I suppose one might say we're partially responsible, too -- Cindy and I have never been crazy about watering lawns, preferring instead to let Mother Nature take care of that job.

The year before the drought killed my lawn was memorable, too. Who can forget the summer of 2011, when the Missouri River suddenly seemed out of control, and the Midwest experienced a flooding event on the Missouri River that was unprecedented for our region?

The flooding was triggered by record snowfall in the Rocky Mountains of Montana and Wyoming along with near-record spring rainfall in central and eastern Montana.

I can go on and on with anecdotal evidence that the weather throughout the United States, and in South Dakota, has had its

BETWEEN THE LINES



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downright strange moments recently. For instance, I never thought I'd be taking photos of snow falling on May 1, but I stood on Vermillion's Main Street and did just that in 2013. Last month, as it was just getting warm enough here in South Dakota to convince recently planted corn and soybeans to break through the soil and begin stretching upward parts of the state got hit with tornadoes.

It's strange to associate that new, green hue that overtakes once barren fields with twisters, but, who knows? Maybe that's going to become commonplace.

There's a lot more at stake, it appears, than the condition of my lawn. Scientists armed with data much more convincing than my personal observations note that yes, climate change is real, and its impact could be extraordinary.

For every seemingly valid study pointing out the dangers of climate change, however, there's an industry spokesman or other expert stating that, nah, it's really not that bad. Or, they may point out that a proposed solution to our climate problems may not solve

anything at all.

The REA, those friendly folks who electrified rural South Dakota along with the rest of the Great Plains, warn, for example, that the Obama Administration's call for cutbacks in the burning of coal will mean, if they're enacted, that we'll all pay more for electricity. Drat.

Maybe we need to consider the advice offered by Professor Michael Trebilcock, of the University of Toronto. His book, entitled "Dealing with Losers: the Political Economy of Policy Transitions," shows that even the wisest policy changes create "losers" (cut coal consumption and the losers may be you and me). The key message of the book is that leaders must mitigate the opposition of those who stand to lose from policy change. Trebilcock proves this with examples from fields like public pension reform and agricultural supply management, in addition to carbon pollution control.

We may not know exactly what the weather will do next, but future climate policy has the probability of creating two kinds of "losers" in the United States. Significant costs will be faced by the oil and gas sector, which is responsible for much of the country's emissions. Second, most Americans use fossil fuels to travel and to heat and cool their homes. Carbon pollution control will make these fuels somewhat more expensive.

Trebilcock offers these ideas for political leaders who want to move climate policy forward without

being kicked out of office by angry "losers."

1. Phase in the change. Carbon pollution control measures can be introduced gradually, with a timetable which brings us to our target as soon as possible.

2. Compensate the losers. Auctions of emission permits or a carbon tax would create new government revenues. Funds could be transferred to affected states in proportion to the economic impact of the measures.

3. Show the losers that they are winners too. Trebilcock, who is from Toronto, notes that Canadians have a great deal to gain from carbon pollution control. We assume that what's good for Canada is good for the U.S., too. He notes that there is still time to prevent many of the catastrophic storms, droughts, and heat waves which climate change threatens to bring.

There's a problem, however. Many Americans, and many of our political leaders, don't yet see climate change as serious enough to merit pocketbook sacrifices. People tend to underestimate phenomena which they can't connect to personal experience.

U.S. Senate candidate and former Gov. Mike Rounds' energy positions include providing incentives for more wind and coal-fired power and stopping "harmful EPA regulation of greenhouse gas emissions." Current U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem has shown that she, too, is not a fan of the EPA, passing

legislation to ban agency dust restrictions that don't even exist.

This is the political climate in which we live -- our leaders are practically guaranteeing that the earth's weather will continue to change in ways that will eventually threaten our way of life.

This week, Gov. Dennis Daugaard has been urging South Dakotans whose homes or businesses suffered tornado or flood damage to take advantage of low-interest disaster loans available from the Small Business Administration.

We can't help but wonder if its time for the governor and others in position of power to begin to heed Trebilcock's advice.

Trebilcock notes that policy leaders need to show how climate change is already contributing to lethal, destructive weather events.

So, for example, the next time another South Dakota community or large region of the state experiences catastrophic warming-related weather (freak March blizzards that wipe out West River cattle herds, strange June tornadoes that tear through small towns, uncharacteristically heavy spring rains and the flooding that naturally follows) the governor and our political leaders in Washington should use the opportunity to tell us how carbon pollution control offers a long-term win for all of us.

How many years of freakish weather will it take for that to happen?

Guest Column:

Geese populations growing too fast

By Bob Mercer
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE -- There's no way to hunt our way out of the environmental disaster that snow geese have become.

And our state's Wildlife Division biologists know it.

One of their top men, Tom Kirschenmann, used the word "havoc" a few days ago to describe what's occurring.

Tony Leif, the division's director, said more hunting should be attempted before "draconian" steps are taken.

There should be 1.5 million to 2 million of the birds across North America. There are 10 times as many. They are tearing apart their nesting grounds in Canada. They breed every year. The 10 percent of goslings that survive and grow into adults typically live eight years.

That means only four goslings per breeding pair of adults are needed to double the population.

This problem spans the entire continent, from wintering grounds as far south as Central America to the breeding grounds as far north as the Arctic Circle.

That's how far many of the birds migrate, including the hundreds of thousands that cross through South Dakota's farm fields each spring and fall.

Biologists warned as far back as the 1990s about the snow geese populations exploding.

The responses have been cautious and slow. Snow geese are governed under migratory bird treaties between the three nations.

In South Dakota, the possession limit no longer exists for snow geese. Licensed hunters can keep as many as they want in their freezers.

The daily bag limit was 20 in 2013. The proposal for this year is 50 per day.

The Game, Fish and Parks Commission members will consider it Aug. 7 at their next meeting.

"In an attempt to meet population goals, it is necessary to use all available management tools," GFP's proposal said.

The 50 won't make much of a difference.

The 2013 fall season had 3,747 hunters from South Dakota and 641 non-residents. They killed an estimated 53,322 snow geese and other light geese. With a daily limit of 20, they took about 12 apiece for the season.

We have many other goose problems.

Biologists rebuilt the population of resident -- that is, year round -- Canada geese in eastern South Dakota. Each year their population grows farther beyond the control of hunting.

Canada geese now pose a threat at Rapid City regional airport too.

The Game, Fish and Parks Commission has added season after season because of the abundance of geese.

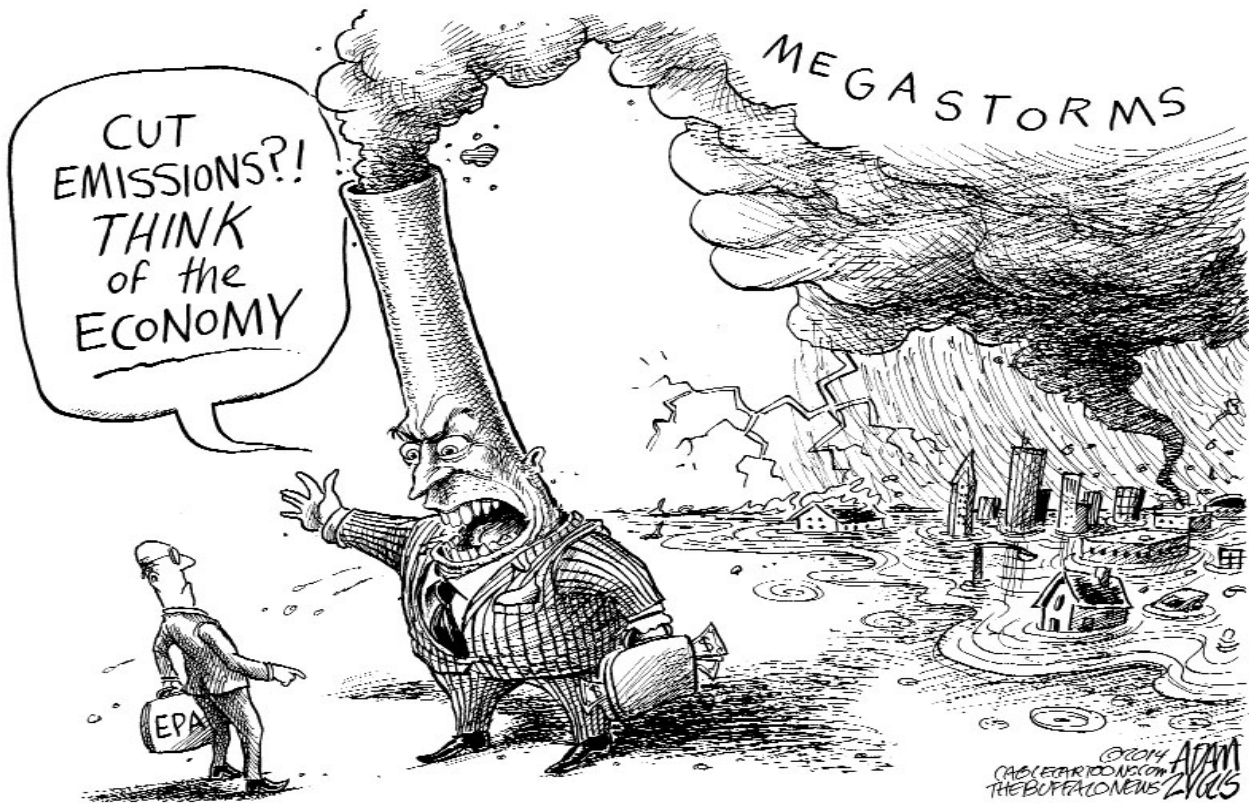
There is a spring hunt for snow geese and other light geese. There is a special August hunt for Canada geese, followed by a September hunt for Canada geese that's expanded this year to include all of Custer, Fall River and Pennington counties.

There is a special spring management take for Canada geese too. But it might be scrapped. Why? Ineffective.

Meanwhile we suddenly don't have enough pheasants. The antelope population is down overall, and depending where you are there might be too few deer.

GFP next plans to transfer bighorn sheep from Alberta into the Deadwood area and stock Atlantic salmon in Lake Oahe.

GFP does all this without the Legislature's OK. Outdoor entertainment is quite the challenging merry-go-round.



Never, never use your bare hands

As far as I'm concerned, restrooms are public enemy No. 1. If ever there were an adversary, this is it -- seat down, please.

My abhorrence with using public bathrooms is a sorry unending tale of how I became an over-the-top germaphobic. Trust me; I was the Howie Mandel of public restrooms before there was a Howie Mandel.

My mother used to tell and retell the story of a 1,000-mile family road trip to Florida when I was three years old. Some 200 miles into our first day of travel, I refused to use a restroom and insisted on returning home so I could go on my own toilet. I can just picture myself: a toddler prima donna digging in her heels. I made such a fuss; Mom always said she seriously considered turning the car around and heading home.

I really haven't changed much, except now it's my husband having to put up with my squeamish paranoia. To this day, using restrooms is a source of extreme anxiety. I'd rather hold it for hundreds of miles than use a sub-par facility.

You see, I have so many rules on the subject, like tissue seat covers -- a must in my book. The thought of all those bare bums sitting there before me! Eew! How anyone could actually sit down without some type of super sanitary protective barrier is beyond my comprehension.

If there are no seat covers available, I begin tearing off toilet paper like you wouldn't believe, building up several layers, putting

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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flushing. Never, never use your bare hands! Ladies, we have to be prepared in life for all situations: domestic, social and public [as in public bathrooms]. For goodness sakes, don't be caught without an extra napkin or tissue in your purse or pocket to cover your hand when flushing. These also come in handy for door knobs, water faucets, soap dispensers and hand dryers.

One of my hard and fast rules is never place anything on the floor of a public restroom -- not your purse, not your backpack, not your shopping bag, not even your kids. Keep them up off the floor -- even if that means holding them with your teeth, squeezing them between your legs or juggling them in your hands.

There are some restroom signs regarding cleanliness that I just don't get; especially the ones in restaurants announcing "Employees must wash

their hands before returning to work." The thought that anyone preparing my food has to be told to wash their hands after using the bathroom makes me completely nauseous.

Some businesses try really hard to promote cleanliness by posting signs like this one: "Our aim is to keep this bathroom clean. Gentlemen, your aim will help. Stand closer. It's shorter than you think. Ladies, please remain seated for the entire performance."

Other places go to great lengths to promote good hygiene, such as: "When you don't wash your hands, you develop a disgusting fungus on your hands. When you develop a disgusting fungus on your hands, the local fortune teller refuses to read your palm. When the local fortune teller won't read your palm, you stress out about your future. When you stress out about your future, you run away and join the circus. When you run away and join the circus, you get stuck doing costume design for the bearded lady. Don't get stuck doing costume design for the bearded lady. Wash your hands."

Ladies, when using Public Enemy No. 1, be sure to wash your hands, cover your seat, use tissue when handling anything and everything and keep your stuff off the floor. Heaven help us.

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