

Wyoming is ambivalent about climate change. On the one hand, the state's climatologist, Stephen Gray, departed early in 2011, "encouraged," perhaps, to seek greener pastures elsewhere. On the other hand, Wyoming is a member of The Climate Registry, whose Alex Carr responded to my email query that "Wyoming is an active and supportive Board member, meaning they—along with the other states and provinces on our Board—govern and guide what we do. As a Board member, Wyoming supports The Registry's voluntary (and high quality) greenhouse gas reporting program." Greenhouse gasses ("GHGs") are the primary drivers of global warming, "climate forcings" as NASA's James Hansen terms it. Hansen's most recent testimony to Congress emphasizes that, unless we act immediately to curb GHG emissions, "we are toast." The "we" urgently pertains to our children and grandchildren, as Hansen's recent book makes clear.

Governor Mead deplores the lack of a federal energy policy, and he suggests that Wyoming develop its own such plan. So far so good; however, such a program must address GHG containment—which is why Washington has faltered thus far. Not that presidents past and present haven't tried. George H. W. Bush arrived at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro convention on greenhouse gases, declaring "America's position on environmental protection is second to none." He was the first signatory on the Climate Change document that came of it, but effected nothing on the home front that would justify the rhetoric and address this country's GHG emissions. Vice President Al Gore went to Kyoto but a vote in Congress prevented his signing the protocol on behalf of his country. George W. Bush in 2003 created the Clear Skies Act intended to reduce power-plant emissions, but industry lobbyists shot down its enforcement. Obama pledged to be the Environmental President but nixed EPA's ozone directives. Even if a miraculous collaboration between Congress and President were to produce an energy policy that regulates GHGs, it's a given that EPA enforcement would be derailed by special-interest lawsuits.

Metaphorically speaking Wyoming, as offspring of dysfunctional parents, finds itself in the unenviable position of having to forestall falling into its progenitors' footsteps and producing its own variant on the theme of dither-and-delay. Some adult children, after taking a critical look at their elders, resolve to go the way of competence. Wyoming could do worse than emulate siblings that vetoed parental incompetence in favor of a more sane approach.

Vermont appears to be such a one. I noted earlier the state's hemp directive over and against the absurd designation of the crop as "Schedule 1 Drug" under the FDAC's Controlled Substances Act. In another matter, its governor recently called on Occupy Wall Street to "Occupy Congress" as regards the 2010 Supreme Court ruling that invalidates part of the 2002 McCain-Feingold campaign-finance reform law. The court ruling means that corporations can spend freely on political ads, up to election time. We need a "campaign for a constitutional amendment to reverse the Supreme Court decision," Governor Kunin declared; we need "to curb the power of money to influence politics. Money often determines not only who gets elected, but what gets done." As concerns GHGs, Vermont has established an aggressive goal of reducing emissions from 1990 baseline levels.

Wisconsin, too, has addressed global warming, producing an Initiative on Climate Change Impacts that includes adaptation measures. "Climate Change in Wisconsin: People and their Environment" spells out adaptation strategies (and is available online at wicci.wisc.edu). It

addresses public-health issues from heat waves to air pollution to water runoff and sewer overflow (due to flooding) to increased waterborne disease outbreaks and the proliferation of vector-borne diseases. For example, the document explains that West Nile Virus and Lyme disease, transmitted by mosquitoes and ticks, are sensitive to fluctuations in climate.

“Furthermore, “Society’s infrastructure is built to manage the risks and impacts associated with precipitation and weather patterns [but it is] traditionally designed,” notes the report, What is needed now includes sewer systems that can accommodate “the additional flow that follows a heavy storm” as well as bridges and culverts that allow “safe passage under extreme conditions.” With climate models projecting an increase in heavy storms, “the risk of economic and environmental damage will increase.” For human health, “business as usual” has ceased to be adequate in the management of current and future risks, states the report.

If Wyoming abandons ambivalence and focuses on climate-change adaptation planning, it will naturally arrive at energy management, for such planning considers the human and environmental costs of a warming planet. Already Wyoming shoulders its share of these costs. Not only did the state, like all others in the nation, absorb Katrina environmental refugees but also last season’s above-average snowfall produced runoff that flooded parks and roads, causing appalling losses of human life and wildlife. A warmer climate means increased moisture in the air, which generates more snowfall. Earlier-than-usual spring-melt can give rise to flash floods. If violent rain- or hail storms should arrive on top of that, the state’s infrastructure is sorely challenged.

If we can’t have a federal blueprint to go by, Wyoming may start by examining how Vermont, Wisconsin, and other states mitigate the effects of global warming. Well thought-out regulation is in order. Governor Mead must address not only the state’s energy production and consumption but also the emissions that are their by-products.