

EDITORIAL MAY 8, 2014

OUR OPINION

The challenge of adaptation

When it comes to combating climate change, it makes sense to follow the principle of going for the low-hanging fruit.

In other words, first seize the opportunities that are the most obvious and most achievable. In Nebraska that means focusing on helping the state's residents adapt. Climate change is already occurring, scientists warned in the last of three reports issued this year by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The report was notable for its regional specificity. In the Great Plains region that includes Nebraska, residents can expect the number of triple-digit scorches to double, the report said. The "transcendent challenge," the report said, will be finding sustainable sources of water. More severe storms can be expected. "Changes to crop growth cycles due to warming winters and alterations in the timing and magnitude of rainfall events have already been observed; as these trends continue, they will require new agriculture and livestock management practices," the report states

The report was written by 250 scientists and government officials and reviewed twice by the National Academy of Sciences.

Unlike the second report, which brought a welcome new focus on adaptation, this report concentrates on ways to mitigate, or address the causes of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Probably the most effective way to achieve that is through a carbon tax, which would tax fuels based on their carbon content, pushing up the cost of all goods and services produced with carbon fuels.

But the political hurdles of putting such a tax into place are formidable -- at least until the impact of climate change is so clear and obvious that there is public demand for action. Currently, however, there is little alarm. The Pew Research Center this year noted that the "American public routinely ranks dealing with global warming low on its list of priorities for the president and Congress. "This year, it ranked second to last among 20 issues tested."

As even a casual observer of national politics knows, it's next to

impossible to get Congress to do anything these days. The country is locked in a pitched battle between conservative and liberal forces that are evenly matched, at least for the moment. The international arena holds just as many obstacles. The United Nations has been holding summits for decades. So far the summits have produced little. Typically they end after several weeks of bickering with an optimistic statement that a foundation has been laid for action in the future.

What to do? State and local decision-makers should identify and put in place measures that help residents adapt to a climate that is hotter, drier and stormier. Those actions also help people cope with ordinary vagaries of the weather, which should help to push climate change deniers to the sidelines. And adaptation will provide a starting point for further action as climate change becomes more severe.

http://journalstar.com/news/opinion/editorial/editorial-the-challenge-of-adaptation/article_a84c44ff-d3fe-557c-acd0-c5185fa36b4b.html