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Climate change already impacting U.S.



By Marc Brodine

The just-released National Climate Assessment confirms that growing impacts from climate change, predicted by scientists, are already hitting the U.S. They include significant shifts in precipitation patterns, melting permafrost, longer fire seasons, severe and sustained drought especially in the Southwest, storm and erosion impacts from rising sea level, and much more.

The report, released by the White House on Tuesday, looks at the difference in regional impacts. Particularly hardest hit is Alaska, with small communities already having to move inland due to permafrost melting, coastal erosion and the more rapid increase in average temperatures in the Arctic. The Southeast, though it has observable impacts, shows the least changes thus far due to global warming. Some areas of the Midwest will have longer growing seasons, at least in the short term, but areas dependent on snow pack melting for water are already facing earlier springs with earlier melting of the snow, causing serious problems for agriculture in the late summer. Unless there is a shift away from still-escalating greenhouse gas emissions, the report warns, U.S. average temperatures by the end of this century could reach 10 degrees Fahrenheit. The impacts could be catastrophic.

Already, growing stress on water resources is causing conflicts between urban dwellers, farmers, other agricultural interests. The drought currently experienced in California is just a taste of longer and more severe droughts in that region, already significantly water-stressed.

In the eastern U.S., the number of extreme weather events, including very heavy rain events, has increased already. The number of extreme rain events has already increased over 70 percent

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in the Northeast. These varying impacts are being seen across many industries. The report notes, “Corn producers in Iowa, oyster farmers in Washington State, and maple syrup producers in Vermont are all observing climate related changes.”

While Republicans and coal-state Democrats

Action must be taken now if humanity is to avoid the consequences of global warming.

have obstructed all efforts to develop a national response to climate change, many cities and states are beginning to make policy shifts to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, and to adjust to the changes now upon us. While this assessment focuses on the science, on the observed changes in process, and on public policy changes for policy makers to consider, it does not deal with the many different and growing struggles taking place on environmental and climate issues. The struggle against the Keystone XL pipeline is bringing together unique coalitions such as the Cowboy and Indian Alliance that recently sponsored a week of actions in Washington D.C. Farmers, Native American tribes, and environmental groups are uniting to oppose the interests of the big energy corporations, which propose to trample on the land these groups depend on. Anti-fracking struggles are taking place in many parts of the country, opposing the threats to our drinking water systems, the increases in earthquakes due to fracking, and the devastation wreaked on nearby communities. The movement to demand that cit-

ies, states, pension funds, and university endowment funds divest from fossil fuel companies got a boost from the decision this week by Stanford University to withdraw all of its funds from fossil fuel "investments." The divestment movement, already successful at several major universities and cities such as Seattle, is growing internationally. 350.org is coordinating these efforts here in the U.S. and working with many organizations worldwide to put the fossil fuel companies on notice that they will pay political, public relations, and economic prices for their profit-taking on production destructive of our common future. The assessment says, "Adaptation and mitigation are closely linked; adaptation efforts will be more difficult, more costly, and less likely to succeed if significant mitigation actions are not taken." Action must be taken on the individual, city, regional, national, and international levels if humanity as a whole is to avoid the worst consequences of global warming business as usual.



Marc Brodine writes for Peoplesworld.org.

Just say no to "fast-track"

PW Editorial

Come hell or high water - in this case, the latest in D.C.'s year of downpours - hundreds of unionists gathered on Capitol Hill on May 7 to campaign against "fast-track" trade legislation and the anti-worker trade treaties the measure would lead to. The crowd, exhorted by Communications Workers President Larry Cohen, then marched off to lobby lawmakers to oppose the schemes. While hundreds showed up, hundreds of thousands were needed. The rally was the latest in a campaign, which unions, consumer groups, environmentalists and their allies appear to be winning for now, against fast-track, also called Trade Promotion Authority (TPA). TPA would let presidents rush legislation through Congress implementing trade pacts - pacts lacking worker rights and environmental protection and even banning local Buy American laws - with little debate, no changes and on single up-or-down votes in each house.

Instead, the unionists chanted what they really want: "Fair trade, not free trade." Green group

members and the National Consumers League joined them. "It's all of us in this together, Republican or Democrat," a hoarse Cohen rasped into the microphone. "Fair trade must work for the American people, not just multi-national corporations." Congress passed the first such pact under fast track, NAFTA, the controversial U.S.-Mexico-Canada "free trade" treaty, 20 years ago. It's cost hundreds of thousands of well-paying U.S. jobs since then, speakers said. So have subsequent "free trade" pacts, with Central America and Korea. Now the administration and business are lobbying for TPA to push through pacts with Pacific nations and with Europe. The Trans-Pacific Pact (TPP) is the big threat, speakers said.

"We know what fair trade looks like, but we have yet to see it," declared Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn. who gathered 150 other House Democrats on a letter to Obama declaring they will vote against fast-track. The unions and the House Democrats are right. Fast-track is a bad idea, no matter whose hands it's in.

Over 150 lawmakers have said they will vote against fast-track.

Alabama fined for anti-immigrant law

Special to Peoplesworld.org

Alabama has agreed to pay \$230,000 in legal bills incurred by civil rights groups that sued the state over a provision of its anti-immigrant law that threatened to push people out of their homes. The agreement announced yesterday means that the state has now agreed to pay \$580,000 to cover plaintiffs' legal fees and costs in two successful challenges to Alabama's anti-immigrant law known as HB 56.

"This lawsuit put a swift end to a cruel, discriminatory, and unlawful effort to drive immigrant families out of their homes," said Justin B. Cox, American Civil Liberties Union's Immigrants' Rights Project staff attorney. "Monday's news underlines that this fundamentally flawed legislation was not only unconstitutional, but also quite costly."

Alabama agreed last year to pay \$350,000 in attorneys' fees as part of the final settlement of *HICA v. Bentley*, a separate lawsuit brought by a broader civil rights coalition that permanently blocked many provisions of HB 56. Monday's agreement in *Central Alabama Fair Housing Center v. Magee* brings to \$580,000 the total amount Alabama will pay in legal fees to civil rights groups it fought in court.

"This agreement is another reminder of the high cost of Alabama's anti-immigrant law to taxpayers," said Samuel Brooke, senior staff attorney for the Southern Poverty Law Center. "But this law cost immigrant families much more in terms of the fear and discrimination they endured."

The \$580,000 figure does not include the salaries and expenses Alabama paid for its own defense of the discriminatory and unconstitutional law.

"Monday's settlement closes another ugly chapter in Alabama's legal history," said Alvaro Huerta, National Immigration Law Center staff attorney. "This settlement, along with last year's settlement, shows that the state is beginning to recognize that anti-immigrant laws like HB 56 are



abandon efforts to revive racist policies like these and instead work toward fixing our broken immigration system."

This agreement stems from a 2011 lawsuit challenging a provision of HB 56 that barred "business transactions" between the state and anyone who cannot prove their citizenship or lawful status. Before this suit blocked the provision, individuals attempting to renew their mobile home registration tags but unable to prove their status could have been charged with a felony because they would have been considered an undocumented immigrant attempting to engage in a "business transaction" with Alabama.

This practice threatened immigrant families - regardless of their immigration status - with eviction. Mobile home parks often require homeowners to display a current decal or face eviction from the park. A federal judge temporarily blocked the provision in 2011. The legislature rewrote it in 2012 to not apply to the mobile home tags, essentially resolving the substance of the lawsuit.

"The court recognized that the state of Alabama acted with an intent to discriminate against Hispanics," said Foster Maer, LatinoJustice PRLDEF senior litigation counsel.

Alabama has had to pay \$580,000 in legal fees to date.

Voter suppression case back in court

Special to Peoplesworld.org

As part of their comprehensive efforts to combat right-wing efforts to suppress minority and other voters' rights, the North Carolina NAACP and Advancement Project will be back in court on Friday, pressing North Carolina House Speaker Thom Tillis, Senate Leader Phil Berger, Gov. Pat McCrory, and their colleagues to release pertinent emails and other documents that will help the Court decide the motivations behind the sweeping voter suppression law the General Assembly passed last summer.

Two months ago, U.S. Magistrate Joi Elizabeth Peake ruled the General Assembly's leadership could not hide their actions during the 2013 legislative session behind blanket claims of legislative immunity. She held that they and their associates would have to make a case for not turning over any documents that might be relevant to the critical issue in the case—the actual motives behind the voter suppression bill. Tillis, Berger, and others challenged the Magistrate's ruling, so now the issue will be heard by Judge Thomas Schroeder of the U.S. District Court in Winston-Salem this Friday.

The hearing comes three days after North Carolinians went to the polls under some of the new voting restrictions during the May 6 primaries. The NC NAACP and its coalition partners have heard several accounts of confusion, and outright disenfranchisement, in polling stations across the state.

Muerte en el lugar de trabajo

Por AFL-CIO en español

De acuerdo a un reporte presentado hoy por la Federación Estadounidense del Trabajo y Congreso de Organizaciones Industriales (AFL-CIO, por sus siglas en inglés), la central sindical más grande de EE.UU., los trabajadores latinos tienen un riesgo más alto que el promedio nacional de morir en su lugar de trabajo. Casi 750 trabajadores fallecieron mientras laboraban en 2012.

“Un día duro de trabajo no debería ser una sentencia de muerte”, enfatizó Richard Trumka, presidente de la central sindical AFL-CIO. “Es inaceptable que un trabajador tenga que escoger entre la vida y darle de comer a su familia. Cuando el congreso de EE.UU. vota por debilitar las protecciones laborales o quitarle fondos a un programa crítico y cuando las grandes corporaciones marginalizan y le quitan importancia a la seguridad de los trabajadores, están insultando la memoria de todos aquellos trabajadores que han fallecido mientras luchaban para poder lograr vivir el sueño americano”.

El reporte, ha sido publicado por 23 años por la AFL-CIO y muestra el estado en que se encuentran las protecciones para la salud y seguridad de los trabajadores en EE.UU. El reporte indica que los índices de muertes más altos ocurrieron en los estados de Dakota del Norte, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana y West Virginia; mientras

que Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Nueva Hampshire (empate), y Washington (empate) tienen el índice más bajo de fatalidades.

El reporte encontró que las muertes entre los trabajadores inmigrantes continúa siendo un problema serio. En 2012, fallecieron 824 trabajadores inmigrantes en su lugar de trabajo. “Este número nos ilustra como un sistema migratorio quebrantado no sólo se presta para que ocurran terribles violaciones laborales por parte de empleadores inescrupulosos, pero también pone en peligro la vida de los trabajadores inmigrantes”, indicó Yanira Merino, la directora de la campaña por la reforma migratoria de la AFL-CIO. “Muchos de los inmigrantes indocumentados no reportan las violaciones a las regulaciones de salud y seguridad porque tienen miedo de que su empleador notifique a las agencias federales de inmigración. Los derechos de los inmigrantes, son los derechos de los trabajadores. El gobierno tiene que actuar para detener las deportaciones masivas, y los republicanos de la Cámara Baja tienen que inmediatamente permitir un voto por la reforma migratoria. ¿Cuántas muertes prevenibles tendrán que suceder hasta que los republicanos actúen?”

De acuerdo a las estadísticas de 2012, el número de trabajadores latinos que han muerto en su lugar de trabajo fue de 748, aproximadamente el mismo que el 2011 (749).

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