

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

## **Biden needs to step up and declare a climate emergency (Opinion)**

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Sep. 24, 2023

Here's something you don't need to be told: This has been a miserably long, hot summer in Houston. In fact, the summer of 2023 has now made history as the hottest ever in Houston, with an average temperature of nearly 90 degrees, and 45 insufferable days over 100.

But it's not just hot in Houston. Data released by the World Meteorological Association at the beginning of September showed that the previous three months were the hottest ever on record for the entire globe, by a big margin. More alarmingly, while global records only begin around 1880, climate scientists believe this is likely the hottest Earth has been in 120,000 years.

That means this is much more than just another hot summer. It's now painfully clear, based on overwhelming scientific evidence, that human-caused climate change — the majority of which is the result of burning fossil fuels — is transforming our planet into a different and dangerous place.

Indeed, being miserably hot is the least of our worries. If climate change continues unabated, the world can expect a cascade of devastating impacts, from intensifying hurricanes to rising sea levels (Antarctic Sea ice hit a record low this summer), to more extreme fires, droughts and floods. And cruelly, the most vulnerable among us would be the first and worst to be impacted.

Here at home, we're already seeing it with our own eyes. So far in 2023, the U.S. is at a record 23 extreme weather events that have caused at least \$1 billion in damage and collectively taken hundreds of American lives. The horrifying wildfire in Lahaina, Hawaii took over 100 lives alone, making it the deadliest U.S. wildfire of the past century.

If ever there was a moment for leadership and action, it is now. Unfortunately, even science has become obscured by partisan politics, such as when one presidential candidate recently characterized "the climate change agenda" as a "hoax." Fortunately, there are leaders in both parties who acknowledge the reality of climate change and the existential threat it presents.

President Joe Biden deserves credit for the climate-focused investments in the Inflation Reduction Act, and for appropriately using the Defense Production Act to jumpstart solar manufacturing, help build out the electric grid and source

materials for electric vehicles. The president's decision to terminate oil and gas leases in the Arctic Refuge is also encouraging, and we applaud his new Climate Corps program to train young people for energy jobs.

But the truth is that President Biden has not gone nearly far enough, and in fact his administration has too often been complicit in advancing the interests of the fossil fuel industry.

Here in Texas, for example, the Biden administration has approved federal permits for new fossil fuel export facilities along the Gulf Coast, accelerating the climate problem rather than attacking it, and putting the health and safety of coastal communities on the line in the process.

Now President Biden must show his true colors. To meet this moment and help save our planet from catastrophe, the president must heed the call of many other political leaders, and tens of millions of concerned Americans. He must act now to officially declare a climate emergency.

Under such a declaration, the president could, among other steps, take sweeping actions to reduce the entire world's use of fossil fuels, such as by reinstating the U.S. ban on the export of crude oil, which was in place for 40 years until 2015. He could then use emergency powers to quickly advance our transition to large-scale clean energy solutions. Not only could that help prevent the worst impacts of climate change, but it could also help create millions of good jobs.

Perhaps most importantly, a presidential declaration of climate emergency would serve as a call to action, both at home and around the world. It could not only inspire Americans to make more sustainable choices in our daily lives and encourage U.S. companies to adopt more climate-friendly practices, but also facilitate international collaboration. Climate change is a global crisis, and no nation can address it alone. By acknowledging the emergency and demonstrating a commitment to respond to it, the U.S. can play the leadership role it should.

When it was announced in early August that July had been the hottest single month in the world's recorded history, one climate scientist notably said: "We should not care about July because it's a record, but because it won't be a record for long." It's as plain as day. The climate clock is ticking, loudly. The big question now is whether President Biden knows what time it is.

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