

Weather – what to expect in coming years

By Gordon Douglas

I write this on my 75th birthday. What I see today in the United States and throughout the world is a situation very similar to the world situation that we faced on my fifth birthday.

Senior citizens will recall that Hitler (and the Japanese) were preparing for massive wars of conquest. It was no secret. However, some people were in denial of the situation. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his Conservative party backers in England and the isolationists in the United States come to mind. So do the French. When Chamberlain in 1938 returned from a meeting with Hitler in Munich believing he had a peace agreement with the Nazis, Churchill told the House of Commons “England has been offered a choice between war and shame. She has chosen shame and will get war.”

In my family my father and my uncles volunteered for officer training school before the real war started. I would see little of them for five years. When the fighting began we were living in Jacksonville, Florida near a Navy Base. When we went to the beach we stepped on sand covered tar balls from oil tankers sunk by U-boats off the coast. The U-boats often torpedoed our tankers when they were silhouetted against the lights of Miami, which was slow to impose a blackout for fear of hurting tourism. Soon our nation would come together and create the most powerful war machine the world had ever known.

Now I want to ask you a question. Would you put your children, grandchildren or even great grandchildren on a plane that had a one in ten chance of crashing? What about a one in a hundred chance of crashing? I hope I know your answer, because this sort of gamble, or worse, is exactly what we are taking by failing to act on global warming.

This brings me to the talk I attended at the Cary Institute last night, “The weather of the future”, given by Dr. Heidi Cullen, PhD, and to the other many talks and conferences on global climate change I’ve attended over the past 15 years. Cullen correctly told a large audience that climate change and mankind’s role were well established by 1970 by scientist Charles David Keeling, who proved that one in four carbon molecules in the atmosphere were isotopes (different types of atoms of the same chemical element) produced by mankind’s activities. Today only the scientifically illiterate and a few scientists beholden to the fossil fuel industry still claim to doubt.

As to the weather, it’s going to be hot. Your grandchildren can expect that it will be 9 degrees hotter at the close of this century -- and that is the conservative estimate. This July’s heat will be the norm in 20 years. Weather will also be more extreme and violent. Events such as the “once in a thousand years” heat wave and the fires in Russia this summer will increase in frequency. The two most likely Global Climate Change catastrophes named by scientists will occur when ocean water floods Bangladesh creating 15 million refugees and also floods California’s Central Valley, which supplies two thirds of California’s drinking water and billions of dollars worth of food. It’s not a pretty picture.

Returning to Churchill and shame. Shame is what a destructive minority of senators are bringing to our country when they recently blocked even the mildest legislative attempt to tackle Climate Change. I wish you a happy and environmental end-of-the-summer.