

Climate Change: Where Are We

By MAGGIE CASTINADO

Climate change remains one of the most pressing challenges facing humanity. The Earth's average surface temperature has been steadily increasing due to global warming. As we enter the last half of 2023, the need for decisive action to address this global crisis has never been more apparent. This August was the hottest ever in both hemispheres and sea ice coverage hit a new low as marine temperatures peaked. As a result, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 2023 will be ranked as the second warmest year on record and "with approximately four months still left in the year, 2023 has already surpassed the previous record of 22 events seen in all of 2020,"¹ with the U.S. having experienced 23 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters thus far. In fact, summer 2023 has been confirmed as the hottest summer, according to NASA's Goddard Institute, since record-keeping began in 1880! Many experts agree that it is climate change alone that poses the greatest present and future risk to public health.

The link between climate change and extreme weather events has become undeniable. While not the sole cause, it is important to note scientific research suggests that climate change plays a significant role in increasing the likelihood and severity of these disasters. Climate change impacts various ecosystems, leading to habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity. Many plant and animal species face challenges in adapting to the rapidly changing conditions, potentially leading to their extinction.

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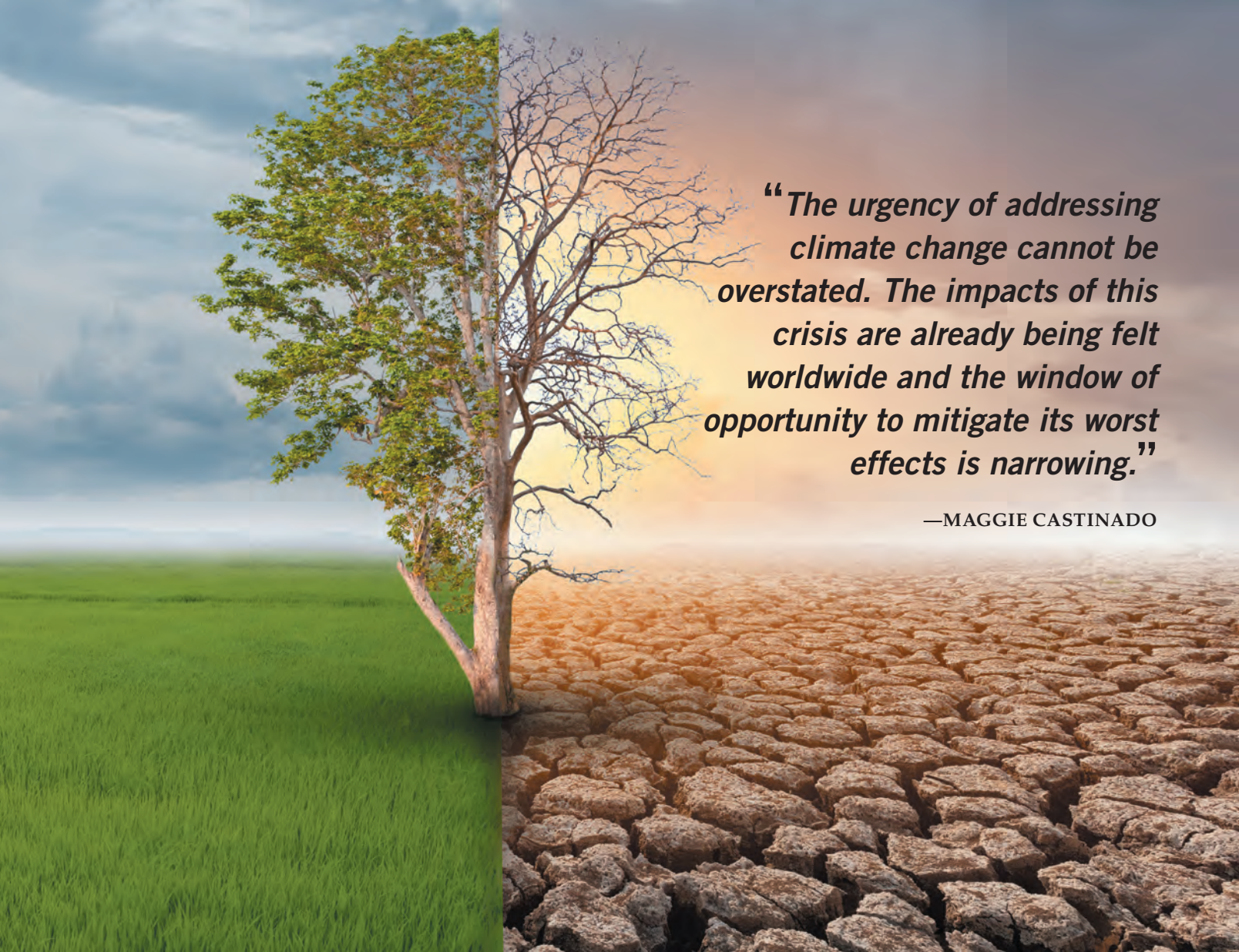
Rising global temperatures contribute to more frequent and severe heatwaves causing severe impact on life of all types, agriculture, and ecosystems and strained energy sources. June, July, and August were a scorching .23 degrees Celsius warmer than any summer on record. Climate change can exacerbate the conditions for wildfires by creating drier and hotter environments. Deadly wildfires in Canada, California, Australia, and Hawaii are a few examples of fires that were exacerbated by the drier and hotter environments causing loss of life, communities, and ecosystems as well as mass destruction. NOAA recently confirmed that Hawai'i's catastrophic wildfires surpassed a billion dollars in damage.

As temperatures rise, glaciers melt and sea levels increase. This poses a greater threat to coastal regions, leading to erosion, flooding, and the potential displacement of communities.

Hurricanes, typhoons, and tropical storms have become more destructive and intense due to warmer ocean temperatures, which leads to increased rainfall and stronger winds. Warmer air holds more moisture, leading to increased rainfall. The increased precipitation in many areas results in more frequent and severe flooding, which can cause significant damage to infrastructure, displacement of communities, and loss of life.

As temperatures rise, other regions experience prolonged droughts, which have adverse effects on agriculture, water availability, and ecosystems.

The urgency of addressing climate change cannot be overstated. The impacts of this crisis are already being felt worldwide and the window of opportunity to mitigate its worst effects is narrowing. A recent report² from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on



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Climate Change (IPCC) has emphasized the need for immediate international action to avoid increasingly severe climate impacts in the years to come. Efforts are being made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, especially from sectors such as energy production and transportation and adapt to the changes already occurring, including transitioning to renewable energy sources, promoting sustainable practices, and implementing resilient infrastructure. Governments, communities, and individuals are called to action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect our vulnerable populations and ecosystems, and forge a sustainable future for ourselves and future generations.

According to IPCC, most Americans support prioritizing the development of renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, over expanding the production of oil, coal, and natural gas. While Americans remain reluctant to phase out fossil fuels altogether, younger adults are more open to it. The report goes on to indicate that the public supports the federal government incentivizing wind and solar energy production, especially seeking an affordable option to purchase electric and hybrid vehicles. Still, Democrats and Republicans have grown further apart over the last decade in their assessments of the threat posed by climate change.

I have created a two-year Disaster Preparedness Task Force as a way for the

Connecticut legal community to help assist with disasters both within and beyond Connecticut that arise from the climate crisis.

If you would like to be considered for appointment to the task force, please contact me at MCastinado@ctbar.org. ■

NOTES

¹ “U.S. Saw Its 9th-Warmest August on Record” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, September 11, 2023. <https://www.noaa.gov/news/us-saw-its-9th-warmest-august-on-record>.

² “Ar6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023.” IPCC. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle>.