2017: Changing minds about climate change

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Dr. Bob Chase, a regular contributor to Marietta Times "Viewpoint" recently expressed belief in Methane and CO2 emissions as sources of human caused climate change. I am a regular reader of Dr. Chase's letters, and that was the first time I've heard him say that. I thought that cause for celebration.

It is a pleasure to welcome Dr. Chase, emeritus professor and former Chairman of the Petroleum Engineering Department of Marietta College, to the view shared by the majority of Americans on this issue. It appears that 2017 was a particularly influential year for many. The damaging effects from various types of extreme weather (hot and cold, wet and dry), caused many Americans to re-think their views. It reminds me that in the Movie "The Day after Tomorrow" about Global Warming the victims froze to death.

The Climate Institutes of Yale and George Mason Universities have, in a joint effort been surveying Americans continuously since 2008 on beliefs towards Climate Change. The institutes publish a summary of their data twice a year. Their earliest conclusion from their fifteen-question survey was that there are "Six Americas" in public awareness and belief on this subject. They described these six as; Alarmed, Concerned, Cautious, Disengaged, Doubtful and Dismissive. In their twice annual summaries, they report the percentage of the population who's beliefs are in each of these categories. As one might expect, most people are in the middle of this spectrum. You might speculate as to which adjective best describes your views. The percentages don't change much from one report to another. However, the trend since 2015 is that while the highest and lowest groups have not changed much, those people in the middle groupings have moved steadily higher on the scale. In 2017, this trend accelerated. The following quotes are taken from the "executive summary" contained within the October 2017 report.

Seven in ten Americans (71%) think global warming is happening, an increase of eight percentage points since March 2015. Americans who think global warming is happening outnumber those who think it is not by more than 5 to 1.

Over half of Americans (54%) understand that global warming is mostly human-caused.

More than six in ten Americans (63%) say they are at least "somewhat worried" about global warming. About one in five (22%) are "very worried" about it - the highest levels since our surveys began, and twice the proportion that were "very worried" in March 2015.

Nearly two in three Americans (64%) think global warming is affecting weather in the United States, and one in three think weather is being affected "a lot" (33%), an increase of 8 percentage points since May 2017.

A majority of Americans think global warming made several extreme events in 2017 worse, including the heat waves in California (55%) and Arizona (51%), hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria (54%), and wildfires in the western U.S. (52%).

More than four in ten Americans (44%) say they have personally experienced the effects of global warming, an increase of 13 percentage points since March 2015.

Four in ten Americans (42%) think people in the United States are being harmed by global warming "right now." The proportion that believes people are being harmed "right now" has increased by 10 percentage points since March 2015.

Half of Americans think they (50%) or their family (54%) will be harmed by global warming.

Two in three Americans (67%) say the issue of global warming is either "extremely" (12%), "very" (19%), or "somewhat" (37%) important to them personally, while one in three (33%) say it is either "not too" (19%) or "not at all" (14%) important personally. The proportion that say it is personally important has increased by 11 percentage points since March 2015.

Nearly four in ten Americans (38%) say they discuss global warming with family and friends "often" or "occasionally," an increase of 12 percentage points since March 2015.

While opinion is not the same as Science, my belief and I hope those also of Dr. Chase now feel that the evidence and the documented science supports the above consensus.

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"2017: Changing minds about climate change" The Marietta Times 19 May 2018: A5