

Missing the Point – Are we going to take the climate crisis seriously, or not?

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Forget about scientific theory and conjecture, there's a [world of hard evidence](#) that humankind, beginning probably with the [Industrial Revolution](#) in the 1700s and increasingly since then, has changed the earth's atmosphere – and not in a good way. So **exhaustively**, pun intended, have we polluted our planet that we've increased the temperature of the earth's atmosphere and water, melting ice all over the place and wreaking other havoc. It's a process, the manifestation and realization of what we've done, may be just getting started.

Is the warming of the earth problematic? Oh, yeah. So much so that “climate change” is considered by many very legitimate scientists to constitute an existential threat to our species. Unfortunately, there's a profound and grossly irresponsible lack of urgency in our response to the climate crisis. It makes you wonder, do we not get it? Do we not understand what “existential threat” means?

Look at the word. “Existential” means “about existence.” If we don't resolve the climate crisis... If it continues to get worse, not better, the physical, political, social and economic damage to our species, everywhere on the planet, will be staggering, unimaginably devastating. To think to ourselves, “*What a mess*” while watching an occasional segment on “60 Minutes” and cable news doesn't come close to appreciating the severity of what's happening to us. How about, “And that's a wrap.” for anything coming even close to life as we know it. Stick a fork in us. We're pretty much done, literally baked into oblivion by our own thoughtlessness.

This is not one of those things that's occurring somewhere else. America will not be spared. We are a large part of the cause, and the effect is going to get us. It's a global catastrophe, no exceptions.

What are we doing about it? What is the United States, whose economy is a major cause of the problem, doing to slow, if not stop and reverse the warming of our planet?

"Oh, well, there's a \$7500 tax credit if you buy some brands and models of electric cars?"

Really? You've got to be kidding. As government programs to save the planet go, tax credit incentives are for weenies – and for people whose Adjusted Gross Income is \$100,000 or more. This is because, in 2020, people with an Adjusted Gross Income between \$75,000 to less than \$100,000 [paid an average federal income tax of only \\$7363](#) which is just less than the federal electric vehicle tax credit for new car purchases. To take full advantage of the \$7500 tax credit, you have to make at least \$100,000 a year. The objective of the tax credit incentive is a good one. It's the level of our response, the effectiveness of the program that's pathetically out of proportion with the problem it's meant to solve.

Why the focus on electric cars? Because, "[According to the Environmental Protection Agency](#), as much as 95 percent of all carbon monoxide emissions in cities may come from motor vehicle exhaust."

[As of 2021](#), there were almost 280 million personal and commercial vehicles registered and presumably still in use in the United States. Just to be clear, we have a total population of 330 million people, of which just over 258 million are 18 or older. We have 258 million people old enough to drive, and yet, collectively, we own 280 million cars and trucks. So much for the power of carpooling and public transportation to save the environment.

How many of the total cars out there are electric? Estimates... Notice that I said "estimates," because apparently the actual number is a national secret. Estimates are that approximately [only 1%](#) of total vehicles in the United States are electric.

Electric car sales as a percent of the total are [increasing significantly](#), which isn't surprising given that we started at zero only a relatively few years ago. Unfortunately, the rate of increase isn't meaningful given how long it's going to take us, literally decades, to affect a complete transition.

Facing a climatic existential threat, the cause of which, in the United States, has largely to do with vehicle emissions, we desperately need to convert our national fleet of 280 million vehicles from gasoline to electric powered *as soon as possible*. And our answer to that challenge is a \$7500 tax credit of which only people making \$100,000 or more can take full advantage.

Younger Americans, 18 to 29 years old like those shown in the featured image for this op/ed, are the age group most interested in purchasing electric vehicles. Unfortunately, too few of them can afford to buy EVs given that pricing typically begins in the upper \$30,000s/lower \$40,000s and goes up, up from there.

What's taking us so long to convert the fleet from gas to electric power? Our problem is that we, Americans, are all about our economy. We tend to rely on capitalism to solve our problems until the crises we are confronting are so large that the people demand that government step in. Free market capitalism, as wonderful a thing as it is in so many respects, tends to ignore problems, the solutions to which are disruptive to itself.

We've known, for example, for decades that smoking will kill you and others who are subject to secondhand smoke. And yet we waited until the 1990s and early 2000s for some states to [ban smoking in workplaces and other indoor public spaces](#). To this day, we've never made the production and sale of cigarettes illegal. Why not? Corporate lobbying and candidate financing are probably the two main reasons.

What we need is a Manhattan Project, a moon shot effort that has everyone driving electric cars in the next 10 years, tops. We need, in other words, an effort that is consistent with the existential environmental threat we are facing.

Will our economy be devastated by our effectively discouraging, even outlawing the production and sale of electric cars? The answer is yes, the effects of stopping the production and sale of gasoline powered cars and trucks may very well hurt, but it doesn't have to. Not as much as you might think. Not if we can effectively transition companies and their employees from fossil fuel to electric vehicle production and sales. Make the transition all about profits and personal income. Make it mandatory – and then jump back and watch what happens.

Will the transition be confusing? Yes. Will it be exciting? Absolutely. Will people who aren't working find jobs and families not making enough do better? Yes, if we do it right. But will we save the earth for humans? I don't know. Certainly, there will need to be many other huge and heroic things to do, but we can't just let climate change happen to us because our government is ineffective and our corporate culture self-absorbed to a fault.

What's the point? Am I recommending that you run out and buy an electric car, particularly in light of the price and various disadvantages of EV ownership? Well, no. What I'm suggesting is that you elect a new House and Senate and President who will commit, in a really big way, to doing whatever it takes to save life on our planet from climatic disaster, in part by the very rapid conversion of our entire national fleet from gas to electric.

-Les Cohen

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