

SWAAG

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Editor, Michael Yoder

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Letter from the Chair

For much of the last two decades, scientists in a wide range of disciplines increasingly point to changes in physical systems around the world that portended changes in Earth's climate. A significant number of these scientists argue that climate changes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are attributable to human activities associated with industrialization and development. It now appears that a majority of Americans are convinced that these scientists speak the truth and have become convinced of a dire need to "do SOMETHING" to combat climate change. Unfortunately, this majority has probably achieved its certainty by "awareness" of the wrong evidence and is mistaken in its hope that something can be done about the changes that are now in motion.

Before I continue further, let me be clear about two things. First, I personally believe that the subtle changes that are now being detected in the global climate record (and the real changes in weather patterns, conditions and distribution of the cryosphere, and many noteworthy, albeit some anecdotal, redistributions of organisms in the biosphere) are the result of human industrialization, urbanization, deforestation, and other economically driven activities. Second, I personally believe that current efforts to examine personal behaviors on the basis of principles of

“carbon neutrality” or “environmentally friendly” habits and technologies will eventually reap benefits in environmental, economic, and even political terms.

Where I disagree with mainstream environmentalists, policy makers, and other activists that say we must face what CNN recently called the “climate boogeyman” is that all of the efforts to change the fuels that we use for transportation technology and for residential and industrial power generation to renewable sources (biofuels, hydrogen fuels and nuclear energy, among others) and raising the efficiencies of the technologies we use, is that these are all superficial solutions to the current crises faced. These “solutions” do not deal with the basic causes of the problem (principally an economic crunch caused by immediate energy supply and demand issues) and they do nothing to begin to respond to the long-term problems that will rise from future climate changes (like rising sea levels, changing temperature regimes and extremes that lead to greater demand for heating or cooling energy, redistribution of water resources and the resulting shifts and costs of agricultural production, redistribution of life zones – which will lead to extinctions of non-economic species that don’t have the ability or the capacity to migrate to locations with suitable conditions, increasing extreme events – floods, severe storms, wildfires, droughts, etc., and perhaps resulting migrations of environmental, political and economic refugees striving for new livable conditions, among others). Rather, the proposed technological solutions merely delay the inevitable changes that are needed.

There is still a dominant view that if “science” and industrialization got us into this mess, then technology and science, with more development, will get us out of it. The technological fix is a good one if one is looking for an approach that will generate more economic activity (perhaps not just new activities within the economic sectors above the tertiary (service) level through research and development and all of that, but maybe even in new resource extraction industries necessitated by the new technologies, but also the manufacturing industries to make the new technologies. For the economically minded decision-makers who argue that the economic future of America is as (or more) important than reducing the unpredictability of future climate (and resulting environmental and resource conditions) within which the future economy must operate (which, by the way, is the general viewpoint of most of the current candidates for the Democratic nomination for president and all of the Republican candidates that acknowledge that climate is a problem), this potential for “clean” and “green” economic development will be the next gold rush. Even automaker Dodge is now producing a hybrid vehicle. Unfortunately, there has never been an environmentally friendly or benign gold rush.

The fact is that simply modifying the technologies that we currently use to exploit and degrade the Earth’s systems will only allow us to continue the exploitation and degradation with a belief and an expectation that the problem will solve itself over time. After all, we’re only humans, right? How can we be expected to fundamentally change our habits? Despite the humanistic rhetoric of the sanctity of scientific endeavors (to blow holes in the atmosphere so that we can study the conditions of space and search for life in other galaxies), the belief that if a technological achievement is possible then it’s “a good thing” (to release genetically engineered plants and animals to the world), and anything that benefits people (or a small subset of people) is right and acceptable (to produce highly radioactive wastes that must be stored in perpetuity). We seem to behave as if we’re really incapable of making the sacrifices that would be needed to manage the problems we’ve created. That approach is neither sustainable nor prudent, given the

large percentage of the U.S. population that will be affected by coastal and riverine flooding should sea-level rise predictions come to pass, given the large areas that will be faced with water shortages and increased costs of energy for heating, cooling and transportation, and the huge populations that will find that the resources that they've come to expect and rely on are no longer within their reach. Americans will find that they didn't make enough changes or didn't change quickly enough to avoid the calamity and perhaps the eventual collapse of the American system itself.

I think that the reason that we (by "we" I mean Americans, because I'm not referring to the "followers" consisting of all of the other people in all of the other countries of the world) have not really come to grips with the real causes behind the climate crisis because the science "debate" has been focused by scientists, policy makers and the media, on the proximate causes and not the fundamental causes. This is not to say that what I believe to be the proximate causes are new to the debates about environmental problems in general, but rather they seem to be beyond the limits of the discussion about climate change. I believe the causes of the climate crisis are fundamentally geographic (by this I mean spatial) and reflect the philosophical underpinnings of the so-called dominant social paradigm (DSP).

The current DSP is that humans are meant to lead an energy intensive life, where we find ways to mine energy from Earth and concentrate it to do greater and greater amounts of work. Ironically, the harder we have worked to concentrate energy to do more work, the harder we work to find ways to do less work. Our diets have increased so drastically over the last two centuries that now one of the biggest threats to the health of people in "developed" countries is obesity and lack of activity to burn off the excess calories. Somehow we find ways to organize our lives and our spaces in ways that meet desires that ultimately bear costs that are spread to other aspects of our lives, to other people and to the environment. Ecologically speaking, based upon the laws of conservation of matter and conservation of energy, growth and development is never sustainable because the consumption is always coming from somewhere and the waste must always go somewhere. So no matter how hard we work on technologies that are more efficient and emit fewer pollutants, the fact is that there will always be an impact. With growing population and a growing adoption of the "high energy" lifestyle, the gains that are made in technology will be overpowered by the rate of use of high energy technology (here come China and India). Indeed, there has been no slowdown in the rate of extraction of energy resources from within the Earth and global climate will continue to change, perhaps at increasing rates, due to the increased production and consumption of concentrated energy.

The key to "dealing with" climate change is geographical, not technological. As I stated above, the causes of the problem are essentially spatial, not technological. If we truly want to manage the near future and help reduce the range of the fallout from climate change, then we ought to be thinking about finally adopting human landscapes that are much more in line with the natural limits within which they've been created. We ought to take the work of geographers, planners and sociologists that support the small integrated, self-sufficiency based communities and strive for models of redevelopment predicated upon lower levels of energy consumption. Working and living entirely within a community would mean a reduction in transportation needs (beyond walking and other human-motivated technologies), would necessitate the development of local resources (instead of large, industrial-scale facilities for agricultural production, water

provision, waste management, electrical generation, etc.), could provide for full local employment, and could be more satisfying in social terms.

Life at a human scale has been the subject of the work of many people in many disciplines, but it seems to be completely left out of the conversation and debate surrounding what to do about global climate change. Geographers ought to be much more involved in the policy debate. We have been doing the research that is most fundamentally important to the issue and our discipline should step up and into the fray. This is particularly important for those of us that are a part of American society, where the costs of our philosophical approach at this time are as great, or greater, than any other way of living on Earth. If we truly believe that we Americans are the leaders of the world, then that means more than simply being certain that we don't follow anyone else's lead. It means that we ought to have the confidence to strike a new path and create a new, sustainable human geography.

John Tiefenbacher
President, SWAAG
Texas State University-San Marcos

Call For Papers, 2007 Meeting in Bryan, Texas

The Annual Meeting of SWAAG, hosted by Texas A&M University, will be held November 1-3, 2007 in Bryan Texas. The deadline for abstracts and registration is October 1. For further information, please visit the conference web site at:
<http://swaag07.tamu.edu/>

Call for Venue for 2008 Annual Meeting

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the original plan of meeting in Natchitoches, Louisiana in 2008 did not come to fruition. We kindly ask for a geography program to volunteer to host the meeting in October or November. To anyone who would be so kind as to volunteer to host the meeting, please get in touch with John Tiefenbacher (Chair) at Texas State University, or Michael Yoder (Secretary) at Texas A&M International University with any questions you may have.

Call for Nominations for Treasurer, 2007-2009

The current term for officers ends upon the close of the Business Meeting in Bryan on November 3, 2007. We are asking for nominations for Treasurer. Please forward nominations prior to the 2007 Meeting to either John Tiefenbacher at Texas State University, or Michael Yoder at Texas A&M International University.

Minutes from SWAAG Business Meeting, 2006

Minutes of SWAAG Business Meeting Norman, OK October 27, 2006

Minutes taken by Michael Yoder, SWAAG Secretary.

1. Chair's Call to Order (John Tiefenbacher). Meeting commenced at 6:52 P.M.
2. Acknowledgements and Announcements.
 - a. Fred Shelley and the faculty of the Department of Geography, University of Oklahoma, were acknowledged and thanked for their outstanding work in creating a successful and memorable meeting.
 - b. Welcome to AAG President Kavita Pandit
3. Approval of Minutes from the 2005 Business Meeting. Paul Mathews made the motion to accept, Bill Doolittle seconded. The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.
4. Remarks from AAG President Kavita Pandit.

Dr. Pandit expressed her pleasure of holding the presidency of the AAG. She outlined some of the noteworthy and positive trends in the discipline. The AAG has exceeded 9,000 members. The number of degree offerings nationwide has increased over the past few years. For example, during the 2002-03 academic year, geography departments granted more than 4,500 geography undergraduate degrees nationwide. In general, the growth in numbers of majors and programs greatly eclipsed any problems within the discipline, such as failing programs. Very few programs have disappeared or been scaled back since 2002. In addition, the AAG is offering even more assistance to geography departments, including resources to help department chairs prepare reports aimed at showing deans the importance of geography.

Dr. Pandit discussed the Healthy Departments Initiative, which provides resources, including workshops, for department chairs and other department leaders to promote their departments at various campuses. The AAG is also sponsoring specialty conferences to make geography more visible by creating bridges with non-academic geographers in the media, and academic members of other disciplines through such initiatives as mapping, GIS, and medical geography.

Dr. Pandit fielded questions about the expenses dues that members pay. She responded that AAG has received a number of grants which will delay the need for raising dues in the foreseeable future. Sarah Bednarz raised the question of expanding the number of journals. Dr. Pandit responded that AAG are discussing a number of alternatives, including the expansion of each issue of the two current journals.

5. Reports.

a. Treasurer's Report (Sarah Bednarz). The report Dr. Bednarz presented will be updated and published in the 2007 Newsletter. The bulk of SWAAG funds have been shifted from TAMIU in Laredo to the AAG office in Washington. This will streamline the procedures of issuing checks. Fiona Davidson said that approximately \$750 in revenues from the 2005 meeting will be transferred to the SWAAG account. Bill Doolittle asked if conducting elections electronically would save money spent on postage and printing. Fred Shelley said the bylaws state that a mail ballot is necessary.

b. Local Organizer's Report (Fred Shelley). Dr. Shelley reiterated how well the staff of the Continuing Education Center facilitated a successful meeting. He estimated between 215 and 220 paid registrants, plus nineteen high school students, a first for a SWAAG conference.

c. Regional Councilor's Report. Craig Colten stated that as the new incoming regional councilor, he has attended a workshop and looks forward to fulfilling his duties. Some of the issues he knows of that affect SWAAG include a petitioning process to engage AAG members in the AAG's democratic process, and encouraging conversations across specialty groups to augment collaboration. Paul Mathews was acknowledged and thanked for his prior service as Regional Councilor.

d. Southwestern Geographer Editor's Report (Drs. Lash and Speights-Binet). Volume IX is currently at the printers. Those SWAAG members who registered in 2005 will receive it. A new editorial board is being created to review articles and suggest additional reviewers. A web site is set up for electronic submissions of manuscripts. Drs. Speights-Binet and Lash gave a special thanks to John Tiefenbacher for his help with the transition of the production of the journal to University of Houston-Clear Lake. Those who attended this meeting will receive Volume X of the journal. Currently we are a few months behind (Volume IX, currently at the printers, is dated 2005). Sarah Bednarz asked if the company doing the printing is unionized. Drs. Speight-Benet and Lash were not sure, but will look into it. Bill Doolittle asked if the printer is a HUB printer. Dr. Speight-Benet believes the answer is "yes" by virtue of the fact that UHCL provided the recommendation of the printer.

6. Old Business.

Future Meeting Sites: 2007 Bryan, Texas (Texas A&M University); 2008 Natchitoches, Louisiana (Northwestern State University); 2009 Little Rock, Arkansas (University of Central Arkansas); 2010 Tahlequah, Oklahoma (Northeastern State University); 2011: Austin, Texas (University of Texas). Possibly in 2012, a joint meeting will be held in New Orleans with SEDAAG and NCGE.

7. New Business.

Collections for SWAAG to purchase an AAG brick. A brick costs \$1,500. Thus far (as of the beginning of the meeting), about \$300 has been collected by Juana Ibanez, including donations by Craig Colten and Richard Marsten. Throughout the course of the meeting, more money was collected. Interested SWAAG donors should forward checks (tax deductible) to Juana Ibanez at the University of New Orleans.

8. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 6:46 P.M.

Treasurer's Report, Summer 2007

SWAAG TREASURER'S REPORT

August 6, 2007

Prepared by Sarah Witham Bednarz, Treasurer

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| <u>Date</u> | <u>Description</u> | <u>Receipts</u> | <u>Disbursements</u> | <u>Balance</u> |
|-------------|---|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 8/31/05 | <i>Account established at AAG</i> | | | \$- |
| 10/27/05 | SWAAG funds maintained by AAG | 420.00 | | 420.00 |
| 8/31/06 | SWAAG capitation payment for FY06 | 342.00 | | 762.00 |
| 11/1/06 | Speights-Binet – Reimburse for printing expense | | (1,759.04) | (997.04) |
| 11/1/06 | Miller - 3d prize paper award | | (50.00) | (1,047.04) |
| 11/1/06 | Myers - 1st prize poster award | | (100.00) | (1,147.04) |
| 11/1/06 | Coleman - 1st prize paper comp | | (100.00) | (1,247.04) |
| 11/1/06 | Harmon - 2d place paper award | | (75.00) | (1,322.04) |
| 11/1/06 | Bennett - 3d place paper award | | (50.00) | (1,372.04) |
| 12/4/06 | Balsetti - 3d prize paper award | | (50.00) | (1,422.04) |
| 12/4/06 | Sakakibara - 1st prize paper award | | (100.00) | (1,522.04) |
| 12/4/06 | Wilcox - 2d prize paper comp | | (75.00) | (1,597.04) |
| 12/8/06 | Check received from University of Arkansas | 900.02 | | (697.02) |
| | Check received from Texas A&M International | | | |
| 12/15/06 | University | 3,648.89 | | 2,951.87 |
| 3/9/07 | Check received from University of Oklahoma | 1,020.00 | | 3,971.87 |
| 6/30/07 | Balance | | | <u>\$3,971.87</u> |