

Vote for whoever will tackle climate change

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In mid-September, I drove west on Interstate Highway 80 toward a bright orangey-red sunset. How beautiful, I thought, also noting the faraway woodlands fading into gray.

Until I realized what I was really seeing: smoke particles that were tinting the sun's light and also dropping a scrim on the distant rows of trees; smoke particles from western wildfires fanned by record-high temperatures that had turned vegetation into tinder. The next morning, I looked at trees around our rural home that had been twisted, broken, and downed by the hurricanespeed winds of the Aug. 10 derecho, another example of extreme weather events fueled by the increasing energy and instability in our warming atmosphere. Turning on the radio, I heard the news about the arrival of Sally, one of several major storms in 2020's very active hurricane season that's been agitated by record-high ocean temperatures.

Climate change has arrived. It's becoming more visible, more obvious each year. And it's touching us all. Given its way, its grasp will only tighten. For example, the second week in September, the federal Commodity Futures Trading Commission concluded that "climate change poses a major risk to the stability of the U.S. financial system and to its ability to sustain the American economy," and the Institute for Economics and Peace reported that hundreds of millions of people may become climatechange refugees by 2100, with major international repercussions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported in October 2018 that if we do not significantly reduce carbon emissions by 2030, irreversible tipping points may govern our future.

This year, with the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been dunked into a pot of disasters, each compounding the others. Refugees from the wildfires, for example, have fewer safe zones for retreat because of the need to distance from others. Both crises are spinning off new economic challenges

and taxing the nation's psychological reserves — indeed, both can affect nearly all aspects of our lives.

Both crises will require thoughtful, well-established policies and significant investments to energize recovery. And, for both, the sooner and more comprehensively we act, the easier, faster, and more complete our recovery will

be. Many nations are wisely tying COVID recovery to climate change mitigation — for example, using recovery funds to speed the transition to renewable energy and establish new energy-efficiency programs.

Iowa has already demonstrated the economic and job advantages of wind and solar energy. But we need to do more. We need legislators at all levels, from local to federal, to guide us into effective COVID-19 and climate change recovery. And we need heads of state — mayors, governors, a president — who are willing to tackle these problems head-on. Our time to act is shrinking. This election is crucially important for the future of life on this planet.

Seeking the most climate-savvy leaders on the ballot and voting for them will be a powerful vote for the safety, stability, and sanity of our grandchildren and all life on earth.

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