

Scientist rings climate change alarm at Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – “The threat of climate change is not from what we have done in the past, but what we do in the future.”

Those are the words of Ken Caldeira, the keynote speaker at last week’s annual Operation Sierra Storm conference, a gathering of television meteorologists hosted by Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority. Caldeira is with the Department of Global Energy at the Carnegie Institution for Science at Stanford.

His concern is that most of the carbon dioxide emissions are going to come from infrastructure that is not built. That prospect also offers him hope because it means there is still time for change.

“We need to stop using the sky as a waste dump for our CO2 pollution,” Caldeira said.



Ken Caldeira is worried not enough is being done to stop climate change. Photo/LTN

He was at the international climate conference in Paris last month. On the one hand Caldeira is encouraged that the world is acknowledging climate change to the point leaders want to do something about it. At the same time he is skeptical about the agreements that were made because he believes those actions were going to happen any way so in many ways nothing new came from the gathering.

“There is a mismatch in what is politically feasible and what is necessary,” Caldeira said.

Previous conferences – this was the 21st – sought binding agreements. The problem any president of the United States has with this is needing Congress to approve it.

President Obama committed to reducing emissions to 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020. Using the Environmental Protection Agency is how he can circumvent Congress.

Caldeira’s repetitive mantra is stop building smoke stacks and tail pipes. He’s taking that call to the average person with the hope individuals will put pressure on elected officials to create the change he believes is needed to curb global warming.

He said the rate things are going now the Arctic ice will melt, sea levels will continue to rise, coral reefs will disappear and the world as we know it going to be very different – even if it’s not in our lifetime.

“It’s not too late to do something, but we need to start doing it now,” Caldeira said.