

Author: Vigorous climate change fight needed

By Linda Fine Conaboy

RENO – Climate change isn't new news, but it is big news now and its effects are becoming increasingly obvious in the forms of horrendous wildfires, extreme weather conditions and the slow strangulation of some of the ocean's most beautiful fields of coral.

In the words of journalist, syndicated columnist and best-selling author Naomi Klein, climate change is an unfolding disaster.



Naomi Klein

Klein forcefully and without hesitation spoke last week to a large crowd at the University of Nevada's 2016 Forum for Excellence. This group didn't have to be persuaded that Klein's topic is a life-changing consequence of man's greed and that it isn't a problem to be dealt with in the future. It's here and the fallout of climate impacts everyone on the planet.

She opened her talk discussing the December 2015 meeting of world leaders at the Paris Climate Summit, where an agreement was forged to maintain the increase in the average global temperature warming at or below 1.5 degrees Celsius, or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit. The agreement was formally signed at the

United Nations on April 22, leaving many observers scratching their heads, wondering how this aggressive stance will be obtained and then maintained given the world's continuing dependence on fossil fuels.

According to a press release from 350.org, a group of global activists who have come together to battle climate change, the signing is purely ceremonial until at least 55 countries representing 55 percent of global emissions have ratified it.

Klein calls the Paris Agreements "a concrete plan for disaster. We know what we need to do to stay strong and safe, but we're only willing to do half of it. What happened in Paris is the best our governments have been able to come up with, but we still have an ecological disaster."

She said the targets reached in Paris are not binding and there are no repercussions built into the agreement. "The same leaders who set the noble goal of 1.5 Celsius are not really willing to go along with it.

"It was a real fight in Paris to keep climate change below 1.5 degrees Celsius," she said. "But in Bolivia people depend on glaciers for water. If we allow the climate to warm, many cities will drown."

Klein said that if we stay on the road we're now traveling, a temperature increase of 6 degrees Celsius is possible, an untenable figure. "We're headed there now. Pakistan suffered a heat wave where thousands died and no one even reported on it. India and Pakistan are now in the early stages of a heat wave with another coming next month."

There was no dodging the fact that Klein is not a fan of the Paris agreement. "The Paris accords are a fake," she said. "They are just words. Political reality does not match up with reality. We are in such contradiction—our political leaders are not willing to take the needed steps."

She said she came upon the climate issue later in life—she's 45 now—describing her previous state as one of “soft denial.” Her wakeup call came 10 years ago when she saw what she called the “tragedy of Katrina” in New Orleans.

“Katrina was ferocious and we're going to see more Katrina's as the Earth warms.” She described the dilapidated state of the levees, pre-Katrina, followed by apathy after the heavy weather slammed into the area.

“There was no evacuation plan. If you had money, you could get away; if you were poor, you were abandoned. FEMA couldn't find New Orleans. This was a case of institutionalized racism,” she said.

Climate change, Klein said, is an accelerant to everything else, making some things uglier and meaner. “Each shock [similar to climate change] will create deeper divisions. Think Flint, Michigan. What makes this possible is perpetual crisis.

“Transition is inevitable, justice is not,” Klein said. “We have to see how the issues are connected.”

According to Klein, we are stuck when it comes to climate change. She calls it a “really bad case of historic timing.”

However, she said that climate change is not a new concept—it's been acknowledged for decades. She pointed out that as long ago as 1988, Earth was *Time's* “Man of the Year”, appearing on the magazine's cover. That was also the year the first climate change meeting occurred.

But the 1980s were years of many changes such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). These events, according to Klein, meant that capitalism could be brought to the entire world and at the heart of this revolution is privatization.

"It's hard to regulate privatized entities like railroads and public transit. Climate change is a huge political challenge," she said.

At this point in her talk, she referenced the challenge faced by those in Nevada who invested in solar energy. "In Nevada," she said, "the Public Utilities Commission did the bidding of NV Energy, destroying an industry. People are being penalized for doing the right things. Corporate money is corrosive," she said.

Klein opined that it is difficult for politicians to stand up and take courageous positions, but she mentioned President Obama's stand on the Keystone XL pipeline, when he cited climate change for the first time. "More victories like this are now being won," she said.

"We have a lot of no's when it comes to climate change," she said. "But we need the yes's too. If the climate movement is to expand, the movement must articulate what the positive side is."

She named undertakings like "Black Lives Matter," where people are refusing to be treated as if they are disposable; fewer fossil fuel projects; women and indigenous people on the front lines; and the BLM's thwarted push to open public lands for gas and oil drilling as just a few of the positives coming out of the climate change movement.

Fossil fuels, she said, need to stay in the ground. "Small steps won't help this problem, it's time for big steps. The time to start is now, but at this late hour, now is not the time for small steps."

Klein is the author of several books, including her latest bestseller "This Changes Everything; Capitalism vs. the Climate."