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Our Climate Crisis Calls for Public Administrative Action

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By John Duffy
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It seems that not a day goes by without more dire information about our climate crisis; wildland fires all over the globe, record breaking temperatures, extreme weather events and more. Indeed, the National Climate Report-Annual 2019 by the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration found that in 2019, the United States had over \$45 billion in damages from climate related disasters and extreme weather events; the cost over the past 5 years was a staggering \$525 billion. Plus, the scientific community has determined

we are now witnessing the Earth's sixth mass extinction event; threatening the ability of the human species to survive.

We are living in the midst of a crisis of global significance. Yet, the daily barrage of dire predictions and disaster reporting may cause us to become desensitized to the emergency. Or, because our urgent situation is global in nature, it may cause us to think that individual actions are limited, and thus, of little consequence.

For those of us involved in public administration, both as practitioners and academics, we have a special duty to take leadership roles to address the existential threats posed by climate change and mass extinction. Why? Because it is the public administration profession that makes key decisions addressing the basic needs of our citizens, allocating scarce resources and bringing order to our communities. For example, it is public administrators that make the decisions regarding how much funding will be allocated to healthcare, to policing, to transportation and to

other basic needs. Through these decisions, public administration determines whether our society advances, and if so, how quickly; these decisions affect activities such as education, healthcare, security and economic activity. Finally, climate change is important to the field because public administrators are leaders who ask the hard questions, who prepare our citizens for needed change and who consider the long-term consequences of today's actions.

So, what can we do to meet these challenges? First of all, we should recognize that our actions as individuals are meaningful and can have a large cumulative effect; in other words, when each of us does a little, all of us, then, do a lot.

As practitioners and academics, we should become grounded in the science of climate change, extreme weather events, disasters and the mass extinction that is taking place so that we understand *what* is taking place and are able to discuss these issues with others.

Moreover, as practitioners, we can take many practical actions to strengthen our communities while also reducing our environmental impact. A short list of examples includes:

- Using an environmental lens to allow consideration of the potential environmental consequence of our decision.
- Using environmental purchasing procedures that consider the contents and energy used to produce, use and dispose of products we intend to purchase.
- Planning for a sustainable future and ensuring that our plans include action items that can be measured to show progress or the lack thereof.
- Planning for hazards mitigation and adaptation by considering the present hazards in our communities as well as how future climate related changes may modify our disaster preparedness as well as mitigation and adaptation efforts.
- Employing basic planning tools such as zoning and building codes to improve the energy efficiency of our built environment while also reducing the exposure of vulnerable populations to disaster prone areas and extreme events.
- Developing local economies that offer long-term employment with livable wages.
- Addressing the basic needs of our communities, such as food security as well as affordable and accessible housing, healthcare and education.
- Informing our citizens of the necessary long-term changes needed to address the climate related challenges before us and describing the measures that can be taken to mitigate and adapt to these challenges.

As academics we too can make a difference. We can:

- Build awareness and critical thinking amongst our learners by weaving information and discussions about climate change, extreme weather events and mass extinction affects into our courses and lectures.
- Engage in citizen-science activities to enhance knowledge of climate change.
- Complete research on the practical measures, the, "Best practices," that communities can implement to mitigate and adapt to the challenges of climate change and extreme weather events.

- Recognize the important role that academia plays in meeting the challenges facing our societies and take leadership roles to inform the public of our situation and the actions needed to achieve a more livable future.

We live in challenging times. The decisions made today and in the very near future will determine to a large extent whether or not we will bequeath to future generations a livable planet. Because of the special duties and responsibilities associated with those working in public administration, we must work with each other and our local communities to create a sustainable and effective path to solving the climate crisis.

***Author:** John Duffy, PhD, CM, AICP, serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, College of Business and Public Policy; as a visiting professor at the National University of Mongolia, School of International Relations and Public Administration; is President of the International Chapter of ASPA, prior to which he served in local government for over 30 years. He may be reached at jduffy@alaska.edu; Twitter: iceclimb03*