



Denial

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When we hear distressing news our first response is often disbelief. Even good news can take a bit of time to sink in, as we saw with some Olympic gold medalists. But bad news can shake our trust and beliefs to the core. We all probably know people who respond to life threatening health news with disbelief, and then remain unable or unwilling to comprehend the reality and the implications of the bad news.

Denial is a powerful protection we humans resort to when reality is tough, unbearable or frightening. Information about the cause and implications of global warming is a threat to our security about life as we know it, and expect it to be in the future. Many people are enormously comforted by statements from people like Malcolm Roberts, the newly elected senator who is known to deny climate change is happening. The prominence given to his statements, no matter how unfounded in science, are reassuring to those who need some sanctuary from a frightening future. It offers a layer of reinforcement to their haven built to defend against fear. And even more importantly it aids and abets the climate deception fueled by the fossil fuel industry.

Other people do move on to struggle with the climate threat by bargaining with it: perhaps it won't be as bad as 'they' say, or man will find a grand solution so need to worry now, or that hot weather will be useful for plant growth and comforting to those who hate the cold. Many of these people stayed locked in this uneasy state, both 'knowing' and 'not-knowing', but still protecting themselves so as to feel less alarmed than if they let themselves know the whole story.

Those who do accept the reality of climate change, and open themselves to learning the increasingly distressing implications are courageously facing their fear. This can be a burden unless the weight is shared by a growing community of people willing to speak up about the crisis we are in. Recently some 20 eminent citizens called on the government to declare a climate emergency in recognition that the "future of human civilisation, and the survival of the precious ecosystems on which we depend, now hang in the balance" (The Age, 23 June). One signatory, Bill McKibben, has written a compelling piece in the US (New Republic, 15 Aug) calling for a WW2 battle against the 'climate enemy'. We are being warned. Have we the courage to deeply care and to listen?

'We are living in the age of consequences. We can no longer pretend otherwise' –
Progressive Democrats of America spokesperson Russell Greene

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