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Son of the Flat Earth Society

Despite what you may have read from those denying global warming, it was a warm winter around the world. Global temperatures this winter were the 16th warmest on record.

In March, rapidly warming water and air temperatures triggered the collapse of a 160 square mile chunk of the Wilkins Ice Shelf in western Antarctica much sooner than scientists had projected. And as ice shelves collapsed and storms intensified, global warming deniers held a conference in Manhattan that rivals the delusionary Flat Earth Society.

The conference, sponsored by the extremely right-wing Heartland Institute, culminated with the unveiling of the "Manhattan Declaration on Climate Change" that urges we reject the views of the hundreds of scientists of the International Panel on Climate Change and Al Gore and stop all actions to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide.

Not since the Flat Earth Society declared that the moon landings were a hoax developed by the late Arthur C. Clarke (to which Clarke responded, "I've written to [former NASA director] Dan Goldin saying I was never paid for this work and unless he does something quickly he'll be hearing from my killer lawyers, Geldsnatch, Geldsnatch & Blubberclutch."), has there been a better example of fanaticism trumping science than this.

Those recommendations would be laughable if they weren't so wrong, dangerous and expensive – and used as an excuse to delay action. The growing scientific consensus is that little time remains to cut global warming pollution enough to avert a climate catastrophe. According to the best research, global warming pollution must be cut by 80 percent by 2050, a rate of 2 percent a year if we start in 2012. If we do nothing and wait only two more years to begin cutting pollution, the rate of reduction needed doubles to 4 percent each year and the costs increase.

It would be easy to dismiss the deniers and their corporate allies, but so far they have been successful at preventing the U.S. Congress from enacting the new policies that we need to fight global warming – which even now some of the deniers don't deny is occurring. The recent conference was the latest event in a misinformation campaign that has kept global warming legislation bottled up in Congress for years.

But the cork may finally be coming off the bottle. There are seven global warming bills introduced in Congress. Last December, the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved, for the very first time, a comprehensive global warming bill, the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act. Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey is a co-sponsor, but Senator Arlen Specter is not. Specter has introduced another global warming bill that would not achieve the pollution cuts required to avert the worst effects of global warming.

There are three global warming bills in the U.S. House of Representatives. Only six of Pennsylvania's 19 House members (Representatives Robert Brady, Christopher Carney, Chaka Fattah, James Gerlach, Patrick Murphy, Joe Sestak and Allyson Schwartz) are co-sponsors of any of these bills. So far, the rest of them, including Representatives Jason Altmire, Mike Doyle and Todd Platts, have not made a commitment to fight global warming. With the future of our environment, the health of the people and economy at stake, Pennsylvanians rightly expect our elected leaders to exert leadership in the most important environmental issue facing the world.

Spring may bring us some action on global warming in Harrisburg. Two similar global warming bills have passed – one in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and one in the Pennsylvania Senate. But neither one has passed both chambers and made it to the governor's desk for his signature. And we are still waiting for Governor Rendell to unveil his global warming action plan which is now almost a year late.

As the climate warms and ice melts and weather becomes more unpredictable and wild, the public may well run out of patience waiting for the leadership they deserve in the global warming fight. But the climate has its own, inexorable timetable that is ticking away as we dither. It's time to reject the extreme right-wing nonsense that seeks to paralyze policy makers with an artificial global warming debate.

Either we act very soon to begin cutting global warming pollution, or our children and grandchildren will suffer the consequences. And they will rightly hold us and our current leaders responsible for their damaged, non-flat world.

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