Jade O’Connor

Professor Jacqueline Brock

English 101

30 Oct. 2017

Is Our World in Danger?

President Donald Trump has made many changes while being in office, but recently he has decided to direct his attention to the environment. Do not be fooled. He has not been helping the environment. The president has created budget cuts to the Environment Protection Agency who only receives “about 0.2 percent of federal expenditure” according to Mike Brown. Along with these budget cuts, he has already left the Paris Agreement, which is a large negotiation between many countries to reduce air pollution. Trump continues to make changes that may be detrimental to the U.S. and the world in the future due to his beliefs that economy should be valued over the environment.

Currently our environment is struggling with the climate crisis. One large problem of our environment is the level of air pollution that the atmosphere contains. Over the years, the entire world has emitted so many greenhouse gases into the atmosphere where they get trapped. In “The Case for Optimism on Climate Change,” Al Gore states, “We are spewing 110 million tons of heat-trapping global warming pollution into it every 24 hours” (2). These pollutants are trapped in the atmosphere for many years and as more is emitted, the earth heats up. Our earth has a carbon budget which is “the amount of carbon dioxide the world can emit while still having a likely chance of limiting global temperature rise to 2C above pre-industrial levels” according to the World Resources Institute. Exceeding this budget is irreversible along with its effects.

The earth is heating up more than it has in previous years which describes the record-breaking temperatures we have seen (Gore 4). Also, “93 percent of all the extra heat energy is trapped in the oceans” (Gore 4). The extra heat in the oceans causes more moisture to be evaporated into the air that is then turned into precipitation. Along with these huge amounts of precipitation, the extra heat in oceans is also stirring up more storms than ever before. Gore states, “So, the same extra heat pulls the soil moisture out of the ground and causes these deeper, longer, more pervasive droughts” (5) These droughts are affecting people all over the world. Syria was hit hard with droughts, which destroyed fertile land and various resources. The lack of resources also includes food supply. Animals and land are being affected by the climate change which both provide adequate food supply for people all over the world. This is greatly affecting those in warmer areas who have even higher temperatures.

Humans are not the only species being affected by this climate crisis. It is predicted that half of the species on earth will be gone by 2100 (Gore 6). And animals and plants are shifting away from the equator due to the increasing temperatures and changing climate. These are only some of the conditions of the current environment that are affecting us and the rest of the world.

The environment is not looking too good is it? Our country’s past specifically shows our vast uses of business and industry. During the industrial Revolution, the environment was only seen as a way of making money so industry continued to build as more pollution was created. The U.S. along with many other industrialized countries used industry to boost the economy and become a successful world power. This industry has contributed to the large amounts of greenhouse gases and pollution in the atmosphere. We also rely greatly on businesses such as energy companies that also contribute to these environmental conditions. According the EPA, 46 percent of greenhouse gas emissions are from industry and electricity and heat production.

Furthermore, there are a large number of coalmines around the world, which emit most of our nations carbon dioxide. Many view coal as a necessary resource and continue to advocate for its use despite its effects on the environment. Trump is a large advocate of coal as he has said many times how much he loves coal miners, which is a large reason he pulled the United States out of the Paris Agreement. The president felt as if the agreement was holding the U.S. back and limiting our coal use while increasing other countries ability to mine and burn coal. The agreement actually allowed countries to create their own goals and standards and it was not legally binding. Trump pulled out of the Paris Agreement in order to continue coal production and create more mines, this will result in excess amount of coal being burned. This will result in large amounts of carbon dioxide being pushed into the atmosphere at alarming rates.

Our current government has not acknowledged the importance of our natural environment and its worth to us. In “How Much Is Our Environment Worth,” Achim Steiner states “Economic benefits of ecosystems extend far beyond exploiting them for resources” (2). Our government should take advantage of these benefits rather than destroying our environment for purely industry and business benefit. Using the environment for commodity purposes not only reduces resources, but it also affects the entire ecosystem. As of 2014, the value of nature was set at 142.7 trillion dollars, said by Rebecca J. Rosen in “How Much Are the World’s Ecosystems Worth”. For example, Steiner states, “In a forest, the value of timber can be significant and obvious on the open market. But the capacity of the forest to prevent soil erosion in surrounding agricultural land is not so easily or readily accounted for” (2). Mangrove swamps and grasslands are also mentioned as they are also very benefitting to our economy but sadly we overlook their contribution to us within their own ecosystem. We need to value nature and the environment in more ways than just commodities because it has more to offer to our society.

Climate change has affected the United States as well as the entire world. Although the climate crisis affects everyone on earth in some way, it disproportionately affects the poor and minorities. Globally, countries close to the equator are at a disadvantage because the earth is becoming the warmest in those areas. These countries are generally poorer countries such as Mexico, India, African countries and they do not have the resources to compensate for this climate change they are experiencing. In the United States, the southern states are most affected also because of their location relative to the equator. These are the poorer states in our country so they also do not have resources to move to escape the effects of climate change. This is depressing for these poorer people bearing the brunt of climate change especially since it is shown that the rich contribute the most to emissions. In “Extreme Carbon Inequality”, Oxfam states, “the richest 10% of people in the world are responsible for around 50% of global emissions” (1). These rich people are the ones running coalmines and energy businesses. The rich do not bear the harsh consequences of climate change yet they are directly affecting it every day and advocating for it to continue so they can make money and build the economy. This shows that the rich should bear the costs of environmental degradation although the poor currently are.

As a successful businessman, President Trump has a large interest in the economy and he seems to have a small interest in the environment. Trump and those in office are more concerned about our country’s GDP and economy rather than our health. In “Does the Economy Really Need to Keep Growing Quite So Much,” Alana Semuels states “GDP measures activity in the economy, but there’s no way to know whether that activity is actually good for society”. She shows how our government is basing our country’s success off GDP yet it is unreliable when discussing our prosperity. Semuels believes a new economy should be created surrounding the health of the environment and the country

As head of the EPA, Scott Pruitt is also helping and advocating for energy companies. He is pushing for fewer regulations on emissions, which will eventually destroy our atmosphere. Pruitt being in office will allow oil and gas businesses to have the power to change regulations to be in their favor. Trump and Pruitt have similar views regarding the economy and the environment. Both place a larger value on economic growth rather than environmental health.

As much as it seems that the environment is in danger and that there is no turning back, there may be hope in the future. Renewable energy is being invested in and being used in many places around the world, including developing countries. Gore states how we have invested three fourths of energy generation into renewable energy, which will benefit the atmosphere, as it will receive less emission. Although renewable energy is a great fix to some of our issues, the gases in the atmosphere will take years to diminish.

Another action that will benefit our country would be re-entering the Paris Agreement. Trump’s argument for leaving the agreement was completely baseless since his facts were skewed. He used jobs as a reason to pull out of the agreement but investing in more renewable energy and becoming a greener society would produce more jobs in time. We would only lose coal jobs temporarily but those jobs would have soon been replaced by green jobs. In “Leaving the Paris Agreement Would Be Indefensible,” Todd Stern states “opting out of Paris will undermine this opportunity to expand markets, create jobs, and build wealth” (3). This shows that Trump is making the wrong decision regarding the environment and the economy as well. He is only benefitting the CEOs of major energy companies.

Our country’s best option is to focus its efforts on the health of our environment and our society rather than the economy and GDP. The article “Does the Economy Really Need to Keep Growing Quite So Much,” describes the effects of adopting a slower growth rate to benefit our society. This slower growth rate would still be positive but it would allow us to focus on the health of our country. Many view that this slower growth rate would lower the success of our country but our country will still be successful. It is the less developed countries that need a high growth rate in order to increase their economy.

Overall, we know that the environment is a big issue that we need to address before it is too late. Government policies have negatively affected us thus far but now we need to take a turn for the best and make a change. This change should be focused on the health of our environment and less about our economic growth. This is how we will start to help the environmental issues that we created.