

# CLIMATE NEWS

From Sheldon Whitehouse, Barbara Boxer, and Jeff Merkley

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## Chinese Scientists Attribute Everest Shrinkage to Climate Change



Ice volume on Mt. Everest has decreased in size by 10 percent over the last four decades. According to Kang Shichang, a researcher at the Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, climate change is to blame. His data was based on long-term remote sensing and on-site monitoring of the mountain top. Due to ice melt, the glacial lake at the foot of the mountain is now 13 times bigger than it was in the 1970s, Kang told Xinhua News Agency today. John All, a climber, scientist, and professor of geography at Western Kentucky University, told *The Atlantic*: “I am at Everest Base Camp right now and things are dire because of climate change. . . . The ice is melting at unprecedented rates and that greatly increases the risk to climbers.” Research published by the Kathmandu-based International Center for Integrated Mountain Development in 2011 showed the Himalayan glaciers had shrunk by 21% over just 30 years. A three-year research project led by the same group showed 10 glaciers in the region had shrunk, with a marked acceleration in loss of ice between 2002 and 2005. The Himalayas provide food and energy for 1.3 billion people living in downstream river basins. (*Forbes/The Atlantic*)

## Spending Earth Day at Ground Zero for Climate Change

We have all seen the iconic Blue Marble photo of the Earth from space, the image that launched a thousand nature essays, but Senator Bill Nelson is among the few people who have enjoyed that perspective in the flesh. The effects of climate change are felt across the world, including in Florida. Nelson said at the start of the recent South Florida climate change hearing: “This is Ground Zero.” Sea-level rise is already a problem in low-lying parts of the world. Scientists have documented that the seas along the Florida coastline have risen five to eight inches over the last fifty years, and Biscayne Bay now floods the streets of nearby neighborhoods just about every month at high tide. “It’s real. It’s happening here,” Nelson said. “Yet some of my colleagues in the Senate continue to deny it.” Saltwater intrusion is increasing in the freshwater Everglades, which is causing problems for farmers in southern Miami-Dade County, and will make the government’s \$15 billion Everglades restoration project even more expensive. The local argument for combating climate change—that it might flood your neighborhood—seems a lot less compelling than the global argument, the Blue Marble argument. But the local argument is an important component and complement to the growing global problems we face due to climate change. (*Michael Grunwald for Time*)

## El Niño Risk Increases as Pacific Gets Warmer

The odds are increasing that an El Niño event will form this year, which would significantly alter precipitation and temperature patterns globally. An El Niño this year would be the first since 2009-2010. According to a 1999 statement from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the strongest El Niño on record occurred in 1997-1998, and helped push the global mean temperature up 1.2° degrees Fahrenheit. At the time, 1998 was the hottest year on record globally. A 1982-83 El Niño was to blame for more than \$8 billion in global damage, including flooding in South America and droughts from Mexico to Australia. Almost 2,000 people died. Climate scientists for decades have been trying to understand the role climate change will play in affecting the magnitude and frequency of these important climatological events, and some scientists believe they are becoming more severe. (*Bloomberg/USA Today*)

## Companies Confront Climate Change with Renewable Energy

Mars has announced that its U.S. operations will become carbon neutral, running off the wind energy produced by a 200 megawatt wind farm in Texas. The chocolate giant has agreed to purchase all the renewable energy generated by the Mesquite Creek wind farm. The 800,000 megawatt-hours it produces every year will be enough to offset 100 percent of Mars’ U.S. operations, including its 37 factories. The company, which also sells pet food and other products, is currently ranked by Forbes as America’s fifth-largest private company. As part of its pledge to go “Sustainable in a Generation”, the company has promised to eliminate its greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. “We are committed to doing our part to limit climate change,” said Barry Parkin, chief sustainability officer at Mars. The project is a joint partnership with Sumitomo Corporation of Americas and BNB Renewable Energy. Mars is the latest U.S. company to announce ambitious initiatives to tackle climate change with Apple, and Google both taking on new low-carbon commitments last week. (*Responding to Climate Change*)

