

CLIMATE TALK

Carbon fee and dividend is preferred climate solution

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Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL) held its tenth annual conference on June 11-13 in Washington D.C. This year, 1354 people attended the conference and 950 people participated in lobbying. CCL members went to Capitol Hill and met with a total of 503 Members of Congress or staff. The goal of the meetings was to promote Congressional action on climate change. Discussion focused on Carbon Fee and Dividend and asking House of Representatives members to join the Climate Solutions Caucus.

Greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide (CO₂) are rising. We know that over a 27 year period, CO₂ levels have increased from 354 parts per million (ppm) in 1990 to 409 ppm in 2017. CO₂ emissions come from burning coal, gas, and oil. When emitted into the earth's atmosphere, CO₂ traps heat, which increases water vapor and traps more heat. The end result is that temperatures rise. To date, the global temperature has risen approximately 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit since 1880. The impacts of higher temperatures include melting glaciers, rising sea level, drought, forest fires and extreme weather events.

If no action is taken to curb greenhouse gas emissions, temperatures could increase 10 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100. Babies born in 2017 will be 83 years old in 2100. Is it possible that this generation will experience catastrophic, irreversible climate change? Will life on earth be livable in 2100?

In a letter to Members of Congress, published in The Hill on June 13, 2017, Mark Reynolds, Executive Director of CCL, reminded lawmakers, that the United States is the 2nd biggest emitter of CO₂ in the world. He offered "an approach that can find common ground between Republicans and Democrats," called "'carbon fee and dividend,' whereby a steadily rising fee is placed on fossil fuels, with revenues returned to consumers. The fee sends a powerful price signal to the marketplace to speed up the already happening transition to a clean-energy economy. Returning revenue to households will shield families from the impact of rising energy costs associated with the fee. To protect American businesses, a border adjustment tariff would be applied to imports from nations that do not have an equivalent price on carbon, providing a strong incentive for countries to follow our lead with a similar policy."

Putting a price on carbon was proposed to Congress by Dr. James Hansen, NASA's lead climate scientist, in 2008, when he testified at a Capitol Hill briefing that a "carbon tax with 100 percent dividend (direct revenue distribution to individuals) is needed to wean us off fossil fuels." In 2009, Hansen testified before the House Ways and Means Committee that "the concentration of CO₂ measured at 385 ppm must be brought below 350 ppm as quickly as possible." He told the committee that "a transparent carbon tax with direct dividend would spur rapid replacement of our inefficient infrastructure and lead

to an efficient phase out of coal. If not enacted, we face a planetary crisis threatening the young and unborn.” With Hansen’s urging, Rep. Bob Inglis, member of the House Ways and Means Committee introduced HR 2380 Raise Wages, Cut Carbon Act of 2009 but unfortunately, it was not enacted.

Unlike Congress, CCL has made carbon fee and dividend the cornerstone of its broad-reaching policy to curb carbon emissions. For the past 8 years, a determined grassroots effort has been mounted in 50 states. CCL now has over 400 chapters and over 60,000 members, who have organized 2306 outreach events and submitted 2850 letters to the editor and op-eds. When not meeting in Washington DC, CCL members attend town hall meetings in home districts and participate in writing letters, emailing and telephoning Members of Congress on a monthly basis.

In 2013, CCL commissioned Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI) to study the effects of a revenue neutral carbon price on the American economy. REMI’s analysis concluded that such a system would have a strong positive effect on the nation. The results of the study showed that after ten years, 2.1 million jobs would be created, there would be a 33% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions, there would be 13,000 fewer premature deaths annually due to improved air quality, a family of four would receive a dividend of almost \$300 per month, coal plants would be retired, and GDP would increase annually by more than \$80 billion dollars.

Jay Butera, CCL Senior Congressional Liaison, believes that the problems of climate change can be solved in the US Congress. For the past 10 years he has had countless meetings with members of the House of Representative urging the formation of a bipartisan Climate Solution Caucus. Starting with the Florida delegation, he finally recruited Rep. Ted Deutch, Democrat and Rep. Carlos Curbelo, Republican in February of 2016. Remarkably, the Climate Solution Caucus has grown to 48, in 2017, catching the national attention of the New York Times. In an article, titled “Cracking Washington’s Gridlock to Save the Planet,” published on May 19, 2017, CCL was praised for their perseverance, discipline, organization and effectiveness.

In his keynote address at the 2017 Conference, Jay Butera noted “that something has changed in Washington DC, the tide has turned. When American citizens demand climate action, when Congress begins to take climate seriously and when Republicans and Democrats sit down and talk about a way forward on climate change, that’s when things start to move.”

So YES! We are closer to passing legislation to limit carbon emissions. Thank you Citizens’ Climate Lobby for your brilliant leadership and dedication to a livable world.

Gail Syverud, MSW, is a graduate of UM-Duluth School of Social Work Advanced Generalist master degree program in case management, community organization, and administration. She attended CCL’s tenth annual conference in Washington, D.C.