

CLIMATE TALK

After Paris, What? Nine Experts' Top Priorities for a Low-carbon Future

Kent Shifferd

This spring an important and insightful article appeared in the *Catalyst*, the magazine from the Union of Concerned Scientists, written by nine highly respected climate change experts. They offer their best thinking of what specific actions should now be taken after representatives of 195 countries agreed last December in Paris on a framework for reducing global warming.



Here's my summary of their "To Do" list of recommendations.

1. *"Accelerate the Shift to Renewables."* It's already occurring with 53 of the world's largest businesses (including Apple, Walmart, BMW) pledging to source 100% of their electricity from renewables. We have the technology to cut emissions by 80% by 2050. A low carbon future is well within our reach.
2. *"Increase Clean Energy R and D."* Focus on three time scales: the short term where we deploy current technologies to the mid-term to the very long time scale. By midcentury we need to eliminate 80 to 100% of the carbon. We are already seeing great progress as the price of alternative energy plummets: In the U.S. a three-fold increase in wind power and a 20-fold increase in solar power.
3. *"Put a Global Price on Carbon."* The highest tax will be on the worst polluters. If countries fail to levy a cost on carbon, then border tariffs on goods imported from them will result in compliance. Such a tax will unleash innovation and investments in clean energy.
4. *"Decarbonize the Transportation Sector."* Transportation in the U.S. uses more oil than all other sectors combined. When the U.S. issued new miles per gallon goals for 2025 that cut the 2010 levels in half, car-makers used existing technologies and are currently on target. Continuing to strengthen the goal is critical. We need new fuels, new standards to encourage all electric vehicles including tax credits, federal funding for battery research and government commitments to buy low emission vehicles.
5. *"Protect—and Restore—Earth's Forests."* Forests trap carbon. Currently deforestation is taking us in the wrong direction. We have to turn that around and begin increasing the amount of forested lands if we are to meet our goals.
6. *"Ratchet up Nations' Climate Commitments."* While the commitments nations made at Paris was a crucial step, it is nowhere near enough to meet the goals. The International

Panel on Climate Change will issue a report in 2018 that will help countries take stock of what they will need to do to increase their individual goals to meet the overall planetary goal. Progress in renewable technologies should make this possible.

7. *“Build on the Groundswell for Climate Action in Blue and Red States.”* While bi-partisan support for control of carbon emissions is gone at the congressional level, we could see more progress at the state level, even in the conservative states. “What if we don’t have to agree that humans are the reason the world is warming today? What if we only have to agree that carbon dioxide is bad, clean energy is good, and supporting energy efficiency benefits us all?” Public opinion polls show a majority in every state supports regulating carbon as a pollutant. Some conservative organizations such as Conservatives for Clean Energy and others are pushing in this direction. Citizens’ Climate Lobby has initiated a bipartisan dialogue.
8. *“Stop Fossil Fuel Companies from Blocking Progress.”* Like the cigarette companies, fossil fuel companies promulgated misinformation about the climate effects of their products even though they knew the truth. ExxonMobil is under investigation for possible fraud by concealing climate risks. Corporations are still spending \$700 billion per year to develop new fossil fuel reserves. They need to immediately distance themselves from climate and clean energy disinformation and from industry and trade organizations and lobbying groups that continue to spew it out and come around to support a carbon tax.
9. *“Start Close to Home and Scale Up.”* While international and national policies are necessary to curb climate change, we also need bottom-up strategies. Most of the policy innovation has actually come at the state and provincial level. For example, Texas invested billions in transmission lines and is now one of the world’s largest generators of wind energy. British Columbia instituted a carbon tax. City governments are committing to ambitious programs. Changing building codes, land use planning, waste management, parking and mass transit all play an important role in reducing emissions. Local governments are sharing their innovations.

Finally, I would editorialize here that if we in the U.S. elect a presidential candidate who has vowed to withdraw us from the Paris Agreement, and a congressional majority that does not even believe that climate deterioration is real, none of this will happen. The U.S. role as a credible leader will evaporate causing other nations to scale back. We face a critical choice this fall.

Kent Shifferd writes and lectures on war, peace and environmental issues. He taught environmental history and ethics at Northland College for many years, is the author "From War to Peace: A Guide to the Next Hundred Years" and lead author for "A Global Security System: An Alternative to War." He publishes a monthly environmental newsletter, occasional op-eds and is

finishing a new book on the global environmental crisis to be titled, "Breakdown or Breakthrough?"