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CLIMATE CONSENSUS-THE 97%
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Citizens Climate Lobby pushes for a carbon tax and dividend

Citizens Climate Lobby aims to organize the public to create pressure behind a carbon fee and dividend system



The US Capitol Building, home of the Congressmen CCL is trying to put pressure on to implement a carbon fee and dividend. Photograph: J. Scott Applewhite/AP

Although a majority of Americans support taking action to address the threat of climate change, thanks mainly to opposition from conservative elected officials, US Congress has failed to implement climate legislation. Canada faces a similar situation where elected officials pay lip service to the climate threat, but have not taken any

significant concrete steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Quite the opposite in fact; the Canadian government has made the exploitation of the Alberta tar sands a top priority, even though this development would make it nearly impossible for Canada to meet any sort of greenhouse gas emissions reduction target.

The situation appears similar to the efforts to implement gun regulations in the US, where 90 percent of Americans supported background checks, and yet this near-universal support was insufficient to convince most conservatives in Congress to vote for the legislation. In both cases, the influence of special interest appears to trump the will of the majority of citizens.

The question for those who understand the threat and urgency of climate change is then how to change this political calculus – how to close the gap between the will of the majority and the actions of Congress. Into this void steps a group called Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL). This group was formed with a very specific goal in mind – to organize and empower citizens to advocate for a carbon fee and dividend system.

Carbon subsidies and pricing

Putting a price on carbon emissions is a key climate solution. Failing to price carbon emissions is effectively a massive subsidy, estimated at about \$800 billion per year globally by a recent International Monetary Fund report. However, that estimate was based on a carbon damages cost that was recently revised upwards by about 50% by the US government after incorporating updated economic modeling. Using conservative assumptions, global subsidies for the climate costs of carbon emissions now exceed \$1.1 trillion per year, and may be much higher.

The absence of a carbon price to account for those costs is a failure of the free market. It prevents citizens from making informed purchasing decisions, because the actual costs of the products they buy are not accurately reflected in their market prices. When it comes to climate costs, American and Canadian consumers are flying blind. Unfortunately we can't avoid paying the costs of climate damage forever, and they are reflected in effects like rising food prices when crops are decimated by extreme weather like heat waves and droughts, with contributions from human-caused climate change.

Why carbon fee and dividend?

CCL pushes specifically for a carbon fee and dividend, which taxes carbon emissions,

collects and divides up that revenue, and gives 100% of it back to citizens. Most people get the same or more money back as dividends as they pay in higher energy prices, but they would make even more money by using less fossil fuel energy.

CCL advocates for the fee and dividend approach for two main reasons. First, it's probably the simplest carbon pricing option. The carbon fee would be implemented at the point of entry (well, mine, or port), and we already have a system in place to return the dividend to citizens during annual tax filings. Second, it's probably the most feasible option to implement, from a practical and political standpoint. The dividend offsets the cost of the carbon fee for most people, so there is minimal financial impact on the public. A carbon fee and dividend system has been implemented in British Columbia since 2008 with great success – the economy is doing well, emissions are down, and citizens have seen no net increase in taxes.

There are also reports that interest in a carbon fee is 'creeping up' among US Senators. Perhaps most importantly from a practical standpoint, as noted in my Op-Ed in the Sacramento Bee with CCL's Mark Reynolds, a number of prominent politically conservative figures support the carbon fee and dividend system. This is critical because the only way to pass any sort of climate legislation is to bring some conservative support on board.

Recently two conservative think tanks, the Heartland Institute (which once again is in the news for all the wrong reasons) and R Street Institute debated the subject of a carbon fee. After the debate, a large majority of the audience of political conservatives and libertarians sided with the R Street Institute in support of a carbon tax.

What Does CCL Do?

CCL trains and supports volunteers to become effective advocates for a carbon fee and dividend system. Whenever a new CCL chapter is created, someone comes to that community and leads a 3-hour workshop to explain how CCL works and gives them the tools they need. CCL holds monthly conference calls, where groups come together to take action and listen to the call. These conference calls can include talks by climate scientists, discussions of recent CCL achievements, and training on important subjects (for example, what to tell a person who argues that American and Canadian climate action is pointless given Chinese emissions growth).

According to CCL Communications Director Steve Valk, the group has grown rapidly, nearly doubling in size every year, now with over 100 chapters, most in the USA and

some in Canada. CCL helps its members write and publish articles in local media, and is now generating over 100 published pieces per month like mine in the Sacramento Bee.

CCL also has the support of some big names, with endorsements from climate scientists James Hansen:

and Katharine Hayhoe:

CCL is also exploring the possibility of launching some UK chapters. Although the UK is part of the European carbon cap and trade system, that system is experiencing difficulties, and CCL aims to maintain UK support for carbon pricing.

Fourth Annual Conference and Further CCL Details

CCL is holding its fourth international conference in Washington D.C. on June 23–25, 2013, with James Hansen as the keynote speaker. Its first conference had 25 attendees; they expect 375 this year and ambitiously plan to hold meetings with every Senate and House office during that time.

Ultimately, CCL provides a path through which ordinary citizens who want to do more to solve the climate problem than just clicking online petitions can become involved. The group doesn't require any special skills, just a desire to try and help grease the wheels for climate policy in the USA and Canada, and potentially the UK. CCL provides useful training, but doesn't require a large time commitment from its members. And the group's focus on a single specific climate solution (carbon fee and dividend) provides a helpful focus for its members.

For further information about the group, see the CCL FAQ, follow its local chapters on Facebook and the main group on Twitter, and/or attend its annual conference this weekend.

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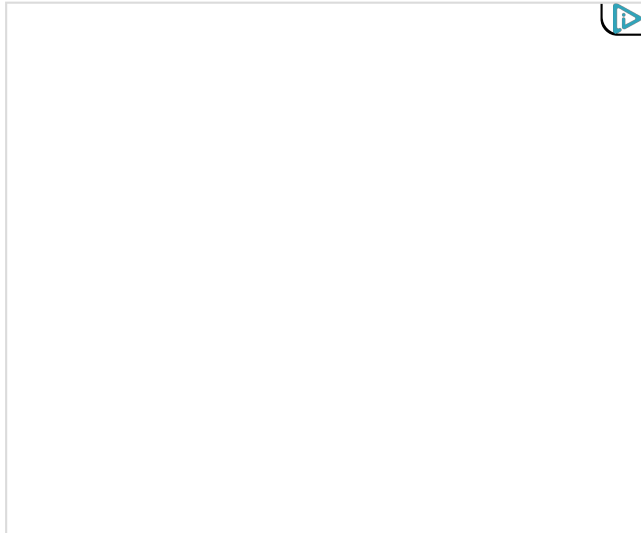
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