

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Guest opinion: Climate change 'insurance' worth passing

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More than 400,000 people from all over the United States marched in the streets of New York City on Sept. 21 to support action on global warming. And in over 165 other countries, people from all walks of life voiced their desire for urgent action to be taken by the world's leaders. This is history in the making.

Hundreds marched in Seattle and Spokane, where people are also very concerned about dangers from oil and coal trains.

Our Congress is so deeply divided on global warming that it seems almost impossible to move them to action. But here's a story from one citizen who recently went to Washington, D.C., to lobby her congressman about global warming and ended up meeting with the congressman's aide, who said there was too much denialism in Congress to pass legislation on global warming.

Instead of quitting, the citizen replied that we buy insurance for things that have a low probability of happening, such as a house fire. Even if people think there's only a 1 percent chance that our kids will be negatively affected by global warming, doesn't it make sense to take out an insurance policy?

Former Secretary of State George Shultz agrees: "The climate is changing. ... Why don't we take out an insurance policy?"

The "insurance" that both Shultz (a Republican) and the citizen lobbyist are advocating is a market-based solution to global warming called "revenue-neutral carbon fee and dividend." The idea is being championed by a rapidly growing nonpartisan, grass-roots organization called Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL).

CCL's executive director Mark Reynolds says: "The bottom line is that inaction on global warming is not an option. If Republicans are looking to avoid regulations, they need to get behind alternative solutions. We're offering a market-based alternative to regulation that puts money in people's pockets and adds jobs to the economy."

Here's how carbon fee and dividend works:

- A fee of \$15 per ton of CO₂ is assessed on fossil fuels at their source: the coal mine, oil/gas well or port of entry. A \$15 per ton fee would add about 15 cents per gallon of gasoline. This fee rises by \$10 per ton each year.
- The proceeds from these fees are distributed equally to all households as monthly dividends – not one dime is kept for the government.
- After 10 years, the monthly dividend for a family of four is estimated to reach \$288 and after 20 years \$396, or about \$4,800 annually.

As fossil-based energy becomes more expensive, businesses and consumers use less and switch to carbon-free energy sources. A study of the impacts of this proposal performed by a highly respected policy analysis firm found some surprising benefits:

- Putting a price on carbon and returning the proceeds to the American people is actual good for the economy. In 10 years, real incomes will be boosted by more than \$500 per person by this plan.
- After 20 years, there will be 2 million to 3 million more jobs nationally than if we continue to do nothing to address global warming.
- After just 10 years, CO2 emissions, which cause global warming, will be reduced by one-third.
- Domestic coal burning will phase out within about 10 years. Coal exports will carry the same carbon fee, making them uncompetitive and unlikely to continue. This will have large public health and quality-of-life benefits for Spokane and other affected communities.

Fossil fuels currently receive \$20 billion a year in federal subsidies. There are no subsidies to any energy source under the carbon fee and dividend proposal. Each energy source pays its true cost, and the American people determine the winners and losers in the marketplace.

Economists agree that this is the best first step to reduce carbon pollution. Carbon fee and dividend has the potential to become the basis for a bipartisan compromise on climate, because it does not increase the size of government or require new bureaucracies.

We must demand that national leaders, such as Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, reach across the aisle and work with Democrats to ensure a bright and secure future for all of us.

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