

# MOSCOW-PULLMAN DAILY NEWS

## HER VIEW: Bridging the climate divide in Congress

Friday, July 17, 2015

By Virginia Lohr



I recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with my members of Congress and their legislative aides to discuss solutions to climate change. What I heard was unexpected.

Many media outlets parrot familiar refrains of partisan divisions in Congress. What do they say Republicans think about climate change? That the earth isn't warming. That it's warming, but it's not human-caused. That any attempt to rein in carbon emissions will wreck our economy.

What do they say Democrats think? That taxing, spending, and enacting regulations will solve the problem. That government investments in targeted new industries are essential.

The messages I heard in Congressional offices were quite different from these refrains.

I went to our nation's capital to attend a Citizens' Climate Lobby International Conference and to lobby Congress for my first time. There I joined other members of our local CCL delegation and 800-plus other volunteers to lobby more than 500 House and Senate offices. Since its inception in 2007, CCL has been cultivating respectful relationships with members of Congress and building bridges across the congressional divide on climate and energy policy.

We lobbied for legislation that would improve the American economy, increase jobs and clean our air and water. We promoted revenue-neutral carbon fees and dividend legislation that would place a predictable and gradually rising fee on carbon, while returning 100 percent of the money to American households without affecting trade.

Our meetings with Republican members of Congress from Idaho and Washington were surprisingly productive. Other CCL volunteers from across the country reported positive meetings with their Congressional members as well. Republicans in both the House and Senate expressed interest in our proposal and asked insightful questions about details. We frequently heard the phrase "negative externalities." That economic jargon captures the idea that we suffer harm, such as asthma attacks from air pollution, when the prices of things we buy don't reflect their true costs. I haven't heard about Republican concern for negative externalities in the popular press.

During CCL lobby meetings in previous years, Republicans often pushed back about the science of climate change. Few did so this year. Why had they resisted discussing solutions before? Mark Reynolds, executive director of CCL, has an idea. He noted that most proposed federal solutions - including the cap-and-trade bill that failed to pass the Senate and Obama's Climate Action Plan that includes carbon dioxide regulation at electrical plants - "involved more government, more red tape and more regulations - things that are anathema to conservatives." Reynolds contrasted those policies to CCL's carbon fee and dividend proposal, noting it is "a solution in harmony with the conservative values of less government and doing things that grow the economy, a market-friendly approach that doesn't dictate which technologies win."

What about Democrats? Would they support a proposal reflecting traditional Republican values? The answer in the meetings I attended was a resounding "yes," with a few "ifs." An independent study of CCL's proposal found it would cut CO2 emissions in half within 20 years, add 2.8 million American jobs, and save 13,000 American lives annually. Those are things Democrats can support. The "ifs" were about whether Republicans would also support it, and if a small portion of the revenue should be used for alternative industries.

I went to DC excited about participating in the great American experiment in democracy that I learned about in my high school civics class. I anticipated being discouraged in some meetings, because of the great political divide that is trumpeted. Instead, I learned that the two sides of the aisle are closer on a market-based solution to climate change than many thought.

A few days of encouraging meetings with both Democrats and Republicans expressing support for a solution to climate change doesn't mean the climate divide has been eliminated, but it does appear to be narrowing. My first lobbying effort to build political will to bridge the remaining divide was uplifting and empowering.

---

**Virginia Lohr** has lived in Pullman for more than 30 years. She is a horticulturist and a member of the Palouse Region Chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby ([ccclpalouse.org](http://ccclpalouse.org)).