

Local chapter of grass-roots climate change group starting up today

By ERIC BARKER

Global climate change and the associated effects to human communities and the environment is an immensely complex problem.

But the solution to it needn't be equally complicated, according to Rob Briggs of Pullman and Bill Barron of Salt Lake City.

The two men are members of the growing grass-roots group Citizens Climate Lobby, which is pushing for legislation that would place a tax or fee on carbon and distribute 100 percent of the revenue as dividends to American households.

Briggs is looking to form a local chapter. He and Barron, a volunteer regional coordinator for the group, will hold an information meeting at 1 p.m. today in the Fiske Room of the 1912 Center, 412 E. Third St., Moscow.

The carbon fee, which would be collected "as far upstream as possible," or at gas and oil wells, coal mines and ports, is designed to put a price on fossil fuels and accelerate investments in conservation and clean forms of energy.

The proposed fee would start at \$15 per ton of carbon emitted and increase by \$10 per ton each year until emissions were reduced to 10 percent of 1990 levels. The dividends would act to offset the higher prices people would pay for energy. According to the group, two-thirds of American households would receive more in dividends than they would pay for the associated climb in fossil fuel energy prices. The group estimates a \$15-per-ton fee would increase gasoline prices by about 15 cents and raise the price of coal-derived energy by 1.5 cents per kilowatt hour.

"Climate change seems intractable but this is something we know will work," Briggs said. "Some of the pushback on this is from people who know it will work."

Barron said the group is looking to build bipartisan support before pushing for legislation. Boosters are selling it as a market-driven solution and believe it should be appealing to fiscal conservatives and progressives alike. Barron said it wouldn't increase the size of government but instead provide a mechanism for the "economy to do the work."

"We don't want the (Environmental Protection Agency) picking the winners," he said.

They said the plan would spur economic growth in a number of ways. First, most people would spend the dividends locally. Knowing energy prices would continue to grow, they could be expected to invest in energy-efficient vehicles and work to make their homes and businesses more efficient. In the long term, that would save them money.

At the same time, they said the proposal would accelerate the move to renewable energy sources. Jobs would be created in wind, solar and other clean energy technologies.

"We need to prove the incentive so those things are appealing," Barron said.

The group envisions a tariff on imported goods so countries that don't have a price on carbon wouldn't have a competitive advantage. Revenue from the tariff would be distributed to American companies that export goods to countries without carbon fees or taxes.

Since its founding in 2007, the group has experienced impressive growth. There are now more than 165 chapters in the U.S. and Canada and about 3,500 members.

"The growth rate is something that gives me hope," Briggs said.

More information is available at citizensclimatelobby.org/