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SOLUTIONS

Huck Fairman

Carbon tax — the tool we need

On its June 7th editorial page, The New York Times made the case for a carbon tax. While the idea is not new idea, many economists, scientists and policy makers point to it as the most effective strategy for reducing CO2 emissions, and thus global warming, and the one most likely to be supported across the political spectrum.

Already European nations have implemented variations of carbon taxes, as has British Columbia, and all have benefited in several ways described by the Times. Moreover the fact is that federal and state taxes on gasoline have long been levied to pay for roads and transportation. Now it makes urgent sense to extend this idea in order to save the environments we've inherited and hope to pass on, but which our fossil fuel usage threatens with rising global temperatures.

Because a tax on fossil fuels would be passed on to consumers, one popular idea for using the tax revenue is to return it to those consumers, particularly the less affluent. British Columbia, starting in 2008, has used the revenue to reduce income taxes, and its economy has grown faster than the rest of that country. Part of the concept is for carbon taxes to slowly rise, encouraging the fuel producers to turn to alternative energy. They could not

competitively continue to pass on their costs, while consumers would increasingly look elsewhere, to renewables, for energy solutions.

Another benefit of a carbon tax is that it has been, and would be, relatively simple to administer. It would not require the complicated cap-and-trade calculations that have had mixed success in Europe, or additional bureaucracy, but could be administered by existing government agencies.

Taxes would be applied to imported fuels as well as those domestically produced.

In 2014, the Citizens' Climate Lobby released a study from Regional Economic Models Inc. (REMI) that examined the impact of a steadily rising fee on carbon-based fuels with revenue returned to households in equal shares. In 20 years, CO2 emissions would be reduced 50 percent below 1990 levels. Because of the economic stimulus of recycling revenue back to households, in 20 years, 2.8 million jobs would be added to the American economy. And improved air quality would result in 230,000 premature deaths avoided over 20 years.

Also encouraging, The Times reports that businesses are taking the lead in asking world

leaders to do more. A number of prominent energy companies, BP, Royal Dutch Shell, Total and others, are taking a "pragmatic" approach to the recognition that something must be done if we are to save our world. Those companies want to both address the threat and to have "efficient and predictable" policies that do so.

For the reasons listed above, the carbon tax is the best solution available to address climate change and forestall its worst impacts. And so, like many business leaders, we citizens should speak out to or write our representatives urging its support. Our political representatives need to hear from us if we are to expect a majority to act. More than 800 Citizens' Climate Lobby members from across the country will be visiting Congressmen and women in late June to discuss this idea.

More information is available at many sites on the web, including The New York Times, the Citizens' Climate Lobby or other concerned organizations. But the scientific evidence warns that we all need to come together to address the problem, and a carbon tax can be the tool we need.

A Princeton resident and novelist, Huck Fairman writes SOLUTIONS in The Princeton Packet.