

January 13, 2013

It's High Time: Climate Change Solutions, A Public Forum

Federal Action Group Summary

Discussion Leader: Anne Kelly, Ceres

Minutes taken by Lexington Global Warming Action Coalition

Semantics: a Carbon Tax or a carbon fee: The word tax immediately turns off those who want no new taxes. Bob English, the defeated Republican congressman who did speak about climate change (and now works at George Mason University), says there are closet conservatives who believe in a carbon tax, but won't call it that. An alternate possibility is a fee on carbon-based fuels, which must be returned to citizens. Citizens Climate lobby is lobbying for this. This is similar to a Cantwell/Collins bill which proposed a fee with dividend. Anne noted that the more the model is a fee (dividend) model, rather than a tax model, the more likely it is to get some traction. She noted that there needs to be a "safe on-ramp" for those who have traditionally been skeptical about climate change and opposed to a carbon tax. A tax is "forbidden" – there is no incentive to put it forward.

Revenue neutral carbon fee: give it back to the people: It rewards people for using less. There was a question of whether the government takes a cut; one response was that it can be used for research into renewables. The idea that it saves our climate, yet is revenue neutral, can help sell it to the American people.

The idea of using language to persuade people (e.g., fee not tax) was discussed. Biblical (Judeo-Christian) or Shakespearean language can give over to some of the conservative folks who do support climate change. The majority of conservative Christians do believe we need to care for each other and the planet and are behind protecting the climate. Bringing in Biblical references and language makes that a more acceptable idea.

Carbon reduction: participants talked about the urgency of taking carbon out of the air, given a possibility of a 6 degree rise in temperature in the near future. We need to be actively involved in removing carbon from the atmosphere.

What about people who would be displaced if we can switch to renewables? Do we need to buy out coal workers? At present there are about 17,000 coal workers left. Anne offered that this is talked about behind closed doors, but is an extremely sensitive subject for families.

What about objection that it doesn't matter what we do because China and India are there, and are following our 'bigger is better' example? The point was made that we have zero credibility because we haven't cleaned our shop. We in USA need to stand up to our responsibility. We haven't considered the economic boom that could come with clean energy. If we lead, we set the standards.

Climate change is a moral issue. We need to be leaders in saving rather than killing. We can do this because we are a rich nation.

Is there consensus: Participants discussed whether there is a growing consensus about the need to deal with climate change, switch to renewables, and reduce carbon. What Republicans believe is difficult to know. Our Mass reps are on Board, but we need to think about New England delegation as a whole.

There was discussion about getting people to see the need for having our reps and the states address carbon reduction and increased use of renewable energy. It was suggested as less an issue of enlightenment than 'waging a war.' The idea of being a competitor to other states may motivate some people, and also thinking of it as an economic issue. The example was noted that EBAY wanted to set up offices in Utah, but told the state they would not locate there unless some renewable energy was available. Companies may be drawn to states that have renewable energy as an option. There is competition between states for business and those with renewable energy get customers. In this context the idea that one might get allies where you might not think you would.

Participants speculated on whether President Obama will come out for climate control because of his legacy. The idea of putting something together and delivering it to Congress or the White House was suggested. Obama needs to push the EPA carbon standards. People should write to or call the white house to emphasize the importance of promoting climate change, and also addressing it in the inaugural address. CERES has a letter that can be used as a model.