

Wyoming Tribune Eagle of November 25, 2016: "Carbon fee and dividend worth supporting." Casper Star Tribune of same date: "Climate change is no abstract issue."

A common reason for opposing climate action is the belief that any reduction in carbon emissions will cause a chain reaction of economic hardships.

"Not so," says Laramie resident Martha del Rio Martinez, a member of Citizens' Climate Lobby. "CCL promotes a plan that will generate jobs. It'll bring economic benefits. It will increase health, thereby reducing health-care costs."

The plan is Carbon Fee and Dividend, CF&D for short. Last week Martinez travelled to Washington, D.C. alongside CCL leaders and colleagues, to put their proposal to members of Congress.

They explain that, in 2013, Citizens' Climate Education (CCE) commissioned Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI) to study the effect of a revenue-neutral carbon price on the American economy. REMI's analysis concluded that such a system would have positive effects on the nation's health and prosperity. During the first 20 years, a CF&D policy will reduce carbon emissions by 50% below 1990 levels. It will provide 2.8 million jobs above baseline. Its reduction in air pollutants will avoid 230,000 premature deaths from carbon emissions.

Citizens' Climate Lobby urges members of Congress to adopt the CF&D plan. Not surprisingly, Wyoming Senators Barrasso and Enzi were less than receptive. Sen. Enzi found an excuse not to meet at all; Sen. Barrasso spent less than ten minutes with the Wyoming delegation. Both senators left it to aides to deal with their constituents.

On the plus side, over the past months and years, CCL has contacted many members of Congress. They have found thoughtful members serious about climate change. Many concur that it's high time to take corrective action.

Dr. James Hansen retired from NASA to raise awareness and impel action on the climate threat. "The longer we wait, the more it's going to cost us," he says in a TED talk, posted on YouTube, that has drawn millions of viewers. He, too, endorses the CF&D model. "If we'd started addressing climate change in 2005, the cost would have been relatively modest," he says. "Wait another ten years, and the expense will be enormous."

For many decades, humans enjoyed the benefits of fossil fuels without realizing that the increased atmospheric carbon was trapping heat and hastening global warming "Today we understand that climate change, if left unchecked, carries catastrophic health, environmental, and economic costs," says Dr. Hansen in his TED talk. Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the burning of fossil fuels has steadily increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, he points out. We are at 400 ppm, up from 317 in 1958.

The costs are mounting for everyone to see. The Department of Housing and Urban Development in January of this year set aside grants totaling \$1 billion to help vulnerable communities in certain states adapt to climate change; of that, a grant of \$48 million is allotted to move an overwhelmed island community off the coast of Louisiana.

Louisiana's Isle de Jean Charles is a poster child for land loss. In the last few decades more than 90 percent of the island's land mass has washed away; what's left is drowning in salt and sinking. Fruit trees and gardens are dead. Wildlife and game have vanished. Homes and trailers are mildewed and rusting. Children miss school because flooding blocks their bus. Under the terms of the federal grant, all island residents must be resettled by 2022.

In South Florida climate change is no abstract issue. The so-called king tides, which happen with increased frequency, seep into cars, invade homes, leave layers of salt on lawns. Even in the absence of rain, flooding has become routine.

In California, more than 100 million trees are dead from climate change's prolonged drought, reports the NY Times "California Today."

"The changes are underway and they are very rapid," Interior Secretary Sally Jewell recently said while speaking in Ottawa. "We will have climate refugees."

What's the catch in the REMI model? It's to tax carbon polluters to the tune of \$15 per ton of carbon emission. While this will increase the price consumers pay for using products generated from fossil fuels, the beauty of the plan is that what's collected from the polluters is paid out as dividends to U.S. residents. Oil, coal, and gas companies record how much they sell. Assuming what they sell is burned, calculating the carbon pollution is a matter of accounting.

Harvard Professor Greg Mankiw, who was Mitt Romney's economic advisor, says that carbon costs should be borne by the companies responsible for the pollution; requiring them to do so will improve both the economy and the environment.

The goal is that the fees, referred to as "Pigouvian" taxes, motivate companies and consumers alike to reduce pollution and create the low-carbon jobs and industries of our future. Along those lines, a Texas coal company is retraining its employees to install solar panels. Wyoming's fossil-fuel darlings can—and should—do likewise.