

# Open Letter to Citizens Climate Lobby

[www.energyjustice.net/files/climate/CCLsignon.pdf](http://www.energyjustice.net/files/climate/CCLsignon.pdf)

As environmental, social and ecological justice organizations, we understand that bold, urgent action on climate change is required. We also know that any truly effective interventions will address economic and social inequity, will take a holistic view of the economy and ecological systems, and will close the door to false solutions. We write out of concern that the current “carbon fee and dividend” approach as advocated by Citizens Climate Lobby and the Climate Protection Act of 2013<sup>1</sup> fails on all three counts.

One glaring concern is that the Climate Protection Act of 2013 would – after raising the costs of energy and goods on everyone – provide monthly rebate checks only to “legal residents of the United States.” This would cause a disproportionate hardship on the nearly 12 million undocumented United States residents whose work is fundamental to our economy in important ways, from providing the food on our tables to caring for our children and elders. **Environmental Justice demands that any approach to curbing emissions does not shift economic and environmental burdens onto vulnerable communities.**

A second concern is that this bill, narrowly focused on carbon emissions in only one sector, opens the door wide open to false solutions that further exacerbate the climate crisis and the health, environmental and economic impacts on communities. Such ‘Carbon Fundamentalism’ has been a key failure of all federal climate legislation proposed since 2009. Carbon emissions are not the only problem with fossil fuels or with other forms of energy. By failing to assess the impacts of energy more holistically, including mining, air pollution, human rights abuses and numerous other damages, unacceptable community health and environmental consequences arise. Nuclear power serves as an example – on top of serious environmental justice concerns, radioactive air and water pollution, weapons proliferation and more, nuclear power’s massive costs take away dollars that are needed to build truly clean energy solutions. A carbon tax makes nuclear power look cheaper than coal and would encourage more wasteful investments in a rush to build more reactors.

This carbon tax also fails to cover all critical economic sectors that are part of the solution. Energy is a major climate culprit, but the agriculture and waste sectors need to be a major part of a climate policy solution as well. By only punishing fossil fuels, a carbon tax puts nuclear power, “biomass” and waste incineration, landfill gas burning, and crop- and waste-based liquid fuels at a competitive advantage. We cannot count on the market to pick the clean solutions (conservation, efficiency, wind, solar and

energy storage) over cheap, polluting false solutions, most of which are worse than coal for global warming. We know that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from trash incineration are 2.5 times that of coal per unit of energy produced, that burning trees and wood waste (“biomass”) is 50% worse, that burning landfill gas for energy is also a serious climate problem.<sup>2</sup> A growing literature demonstrated that biofuels are very inefficient to produce and when full lifecycle assessments are completed, many have a carbon footprint comparable to, or worse than fossil fuels. Because of the very large land area, soil, water and fertilizer requirements to grow crops and trees for bioenergy, most biofuels result in vast, largely unacknowledged carbon and nitrous oxide emissions, depletion of soils and water resources, biodiversity losses as well as conflicts and human rights abuses, including escalating hunger due to food price increases. Recent science also tells us that these “biogenic” sources are not carbon neutral in any meaningful time-frame – that it takes several decades for wood burning to become just as bad as coal if trees are grown and left alone to compensate for the extra CO<sub>2</sub> released, and centuries to approach carbon neutrality.<sup>3</sup> A study published in Science reported that measures such as a carbon tax applied to fossil but not to biogenic emissions, would result in conversion of virtually all remaining natural forests, grasslands and other ecosystems to energy crop monocultures by 2065.<sup>4</sup> The Climate Protection Act of 2013 makes the mistake of explicitly providing for these technologies. Again, all these so-called alternatives create very serious health, environmental, economic and ecological problems, which is why they are referred to as “false solutions.”

It’s wrong to assume that a carbon tax would somehow cover all of the bases indirectly. As the policy is crafted, it does not cover trees and crops cut and burned for energy, or even the oil used to make the plastics that end up in incinerators. With ongoing efforts to allow unregulated waste burning in coal power plants and in many thousands of boilers, the profitable and polluting switch from coal to mass-scale waste burning could be aided by a fossil fuel-focused carbon tax, making the climate problem even worse.

The Climate Protection Act of 2013 poorly attempts to tackle the highly complex matter of imports and exports of goods, providing for a “border adjustment levy on all imports from countries that do not price carbon similarly” as well as rebates to exporters. As we’ve seen in carbon markets, these complex economic arrangements, fraught with subjective and easily manipulated calculations, are a recipe for fraud.

<sup>1</sup> See a copy of the bill at [www.sanders.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/0121413-ClimateProtectionAct.pdf](http://www.sanders.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/0121413-ClimateProtectionAct.pdf) and a 2-page summary at: [www.sanders.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/021413-2pager.pdf](http://www.sanders.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/021413-2pager.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See: [www.energyjustice.net/egrid](http://www.energyjustice.net/egrid) and [www.energyjustice.net/lfg](http://www.energyjustice.net/lfg)

<sup>3</sup> See: [www.energyjustice.net/biomass/climate](http://www.energyjustice.net/biomass/climate)

<sup>4</sup> Marshall Wise, et. al., “Implications of Limiting CO<sub>2</sub> Concentrations for Land Use and Energy,” *Science*, May 2010.

The market does not know best. Setting a price on carbon does not guarantee that changes will be made in a meaningful time frame or that the changes will lead us toward clean solutions. We know what we need, and we know what it takes to get there. We need a comprehensive Just Economic Transition strategy that cleans up both our elections and our energy system; that reduces energy and material consumption; that mandates a scheduled shift to clean solutions, divesting from dirty energy subsidies in everything from tax breaks to oil wars and investing in clean, efficient, community controlled energy; that sets a zero-waste goal; and adopts a climate-friendly food system that reduces travel miles and supports small, organic producers. We know what the policy mechanisms are to do it.<sup>5</sup>

Signed,

**National/International Groups:**

- Energy Justice Network
- American Environmental Health Studies Project
- Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests
- Biofuelwatch
- Carbon Trade Watch
- Earth Day Network
- Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA)
- Global Justice Ecology Project
- Indigenous Environmental Network
- Institute for Local Self-Reliance
- Labor Network for Sustainability
- Nuclear Hotseat Podcast
- Proposition One Campaign
- Student Environmental Action Coalition

**Regional/State/Local Groups:**

- Don't Waste Arizona (Arizona)
- Protect Arkansas Watersheds (Arkansas)
- California Communities Against Toxics (California)
- Citizen's Climate Lobby - Eastbay California Group (California)
- Ecological Options Network (California)
- Human Nature (California)
- Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project (California)
- Nuke Free North County (California)
- San Clemente Green (California)
- Terra Foundation (California)
- Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment) (California)
- Turtle Island Restoration Network (California)
- WasteSleuth.com (California)
- Clean Energy Action (Colorado)
- Capitalism vs. the Climate (Connecticut)
- Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice (Connecticut)
- Green Delaware (Delaware)
- Environmental Alliance of North Florida (Florida)
- Florida Environmental Justice Network (Florida)
- Florida League of Conservation Voters (Florida)
- Floridians Against Incinerators In Disguise (Florida)
- Friends of the Fenholloway River (Florida)
- Help Our Polluted Environment (Florida)
- Friends of Bell Smith Springs (Illinois)
- Citizens' Alliance for Responsible Energy (Indiana)
- Heartwood (Indiana)
- Green State Solutions (Iowa)
- Concerned Citizens of Franklin County (Massachusetts)
- The Enviro Show (Massachusetts)
- East Michigan Environmental Action Council (Michigan)
- Concerned Citizens of Perryville (Missouri)
- Ozark Riverkeepers (Missouri)
- Los Jardines Institute (The Gardens Institute) (New Mexico)
- Occupy New Mexico (New Mexico)
- Coalition Against Nukes (New York)
- Empire State Consumer Project (New York)
- Radiation Truth (New York)
- Selkirk, Coeymans, Ravena Against Pollution (SCRAP) (New York)
- SAFE Carolinas (North Carolina)
- Yadkin Riverkeeper (North Carolina)
- Beyond Toxics (Oregon)
- Our Forests (Oregon)

Not politically realistic? No effective climate legislation is currently politically realistic at the federal level. Indeed, strong and effective federal action on climate would be welcomed. However, to be able to win any effective climate legislation at the federal level, our first priority must be clean and fair elections.<sup>6</sup> We must unshackle our democracy from corporate control and political bribery before we can achieve success. Meanwhile, we must continue to build our power and advance the policies and projects from the community, municipal, state and regional levels, which is what grassroots organizing has been doing for decades: shutting down and preventing polluting facilities from coming online at the source while creating vibrant real solutions right at the community level.

<sup>5</sup> See: [www.energyjustice.net/solutions/](http://www.energyjustice.net/solutions/)

<sup>6</sup> See: [www.corporations.org/solutions/elections/](http://www.corporations.org/solutions/elections/)

- Save Our Rural Oregon (Oregon)
- Citizen Power (Pennsylvania)
- Crawford Area Residents for the Environment (Pennsylvania)
- Green Party of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania)
- Lake Erie Region Conservancy (Pennsylvania)
- Cumberland Countians for Peace & Justice (Tennessee)
- Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility (Tennessee)
- Canyon Country Rising Tide (Utah)
- Uranium Watch (Utah)
- Concerned Citizens of Giles County (Virginia)
- Market Air Quality Campaign (Washington)
- Port Townsend AirWatchers (Washington)
- World Temperate Rainforest Network (Washington)
- Leadership Council, Sinsinawa Dominicans (Wisconsin)

**Groups Outside the U.S.:**

- National Toxics Network (Australia)
- Durham Environment Watch (Canada)
- HSR Services (Canada)
- Zero Waste Canada (Canada)
- Rettet den Regenwald e. V. (Germany)
- Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre (Nigeria)
- Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (Pakistan)
- Centre for Civil Society (South Africa)
- Earthlife Africa Cape Town (South Africa)
- groundWork - Friends of the Earth South Africa (South Africa)
- Institute for Zero Waste in Africa (South Africa)
- Acacia Development Society (ADESO) (Tanzania)
- Irteco (Tanzania)
- Green Alternatives to Incineration in Scotland (UK)
- The Corner House (UK)
- United Kingdom Without Incineration Network (UK)

**Individuals:**

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