Political Will for a Livable World

Why it matters and how each of us can help

The Problem and the Opportunity

Earth's climate has been unusually stable for the past 10,000 years. That stability enabled the development of agriculture, cities, trade, science, and technology. Human civilization flourished. But in the late 1800s, scientists realized rising concentrations of carbon dioxide in the air from fossil fuel pollution would warm the planet. By 1900, the warming had begun. The buildup of greenhouse gases from fossil fuel use has accelerated the warming ever since. Today, higher temperatures and the rapid pace of warming are putting natural systems that support human civilization in jeopardy.

Clean energy, efficiency, electrification, and other solutions reduce emissions and create jobs and economic opportunities. But technology alone is not enough for our safety. We need fundamental policy changes to accelerate the transition to these solutions at the pace and scale required. Economists broadly agree that carbon pricing is the most cost-effective way to drive private investment, innovation, and deployment of those solutions. The policy modeling tool En-ROADS shows that a strong global carbon price can deliver half the emissions reductions needed to achieve our climate goals. Experts ranging from former U.S. Treasury Secretaries to the IPCC say this specific policy is required to achieve our climate goals.

> "We cannot solve the climate crisis without effective carbon pricing."
> – Former US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen

Worldwide, carbon pricing has been spreading and prices have been rising for decades. The U.S. is now the only developed country without a national carbon price. Political will to price carbon in the U.S. has been lacking, so Congress hasn't done it.

Carbon Fee and Dividend

Nearly 70% of Americans support charging fossil fuel producers a carbon fee, according to polling from Yale Climate Communications. Support rises by another 10% if the money collected is returned to all households in equal shares. This cash-back dividend option supports a strong carbon price and is popular because most people get more cash back than they pay in trickle-down higher prices. Those with the smallest carbon footprints benefit the most.

Paired with a border carbon adjustment to level the playing field in trade, this policy makes American businesses more competitive and motivates other countries to match our carbon price.

This Carbon Fee and Dividend (CF&D) approach is supported by thousands of U.S. economists from across the political spectrum in the largest public statement ever by economists. A bipartisan bill that implemented the policy was introduced in Congress several years ago. In a following session, support grew to 96 cosponsors. Various groups have been working to build political will to pass the legislation, but more is needed. This is where you come in.

Getting Started

A good way to start is by reviewing the CF&D policy, the Economists' Statement on Carbon Dividends, the En-ROADS flyer, and the Household Impact Study summary at carboncashback.org/resources.

Then talk with friends or family. People support CF&D for different reasons: cleaner air, economic competitiveness, responsible stewardship, or protecting the future for their children and grandchildren. Practice helping others discover their reasons. Then try some of the projects below to expand your impact.

Help Build Political Will

Contact Congress. Send periodic emails urging your representatives to support carbon fee and dividend legislation, and encourage others to do the same. This is quick and easy from cclusa.org/write-cfd.

Community outreach. Organize library displays, discussion events, or information tables at local events to introduce people to CF&D and help citizens ask Congress for federal legislation.

Promote the CFD Movement. Youth who want to do something about climate change can join this student-led project (cfdmovement.org) for their high school or college. This is a poster and sticker-based project that a school club can adopt to help classmates learn about and support CF&D.

Build leader support. Share the En-ROADS flyer and Economists' Statement with business, civic, and community leaders, then ask them to endorse federal "carbon cashback" legislation at cclusa.org/endorse.

Engage with candidates. Attend town halls or campaign events and ask a climate question. Share information about CF&D and learn where state and federal candidates stand. (See "Talk Climate With Candidates," *Green Energy Times*, October 2024). Or meet in person with a candidate and a few friends to discuss their climate views and share CF&D resources.

Work with local governments. Municipal resolutions and state legislative testimony can help raise awareness, prepare communities for a national carbon price, and build support for federal CF&D legislation.

Details and more project ideas are available at carboncashback.org/projects.

The Big Picture

Many Americans are concerned about what climate change means for their families' futures, yet relatively few contact their elected officials about the experts' most widely recommended solution. Closing that gap is essential.

Carbon pricing is necessary, and the Carbon Fee and Dividend approach is good for people and businesses. The only thing missing is political will.

Creating political will is up to each of us. This requires becoming informed, speaking up, and pressuring our leaders to act. When enough citizens do that, Congress will pass the legislation needed for a livable world.

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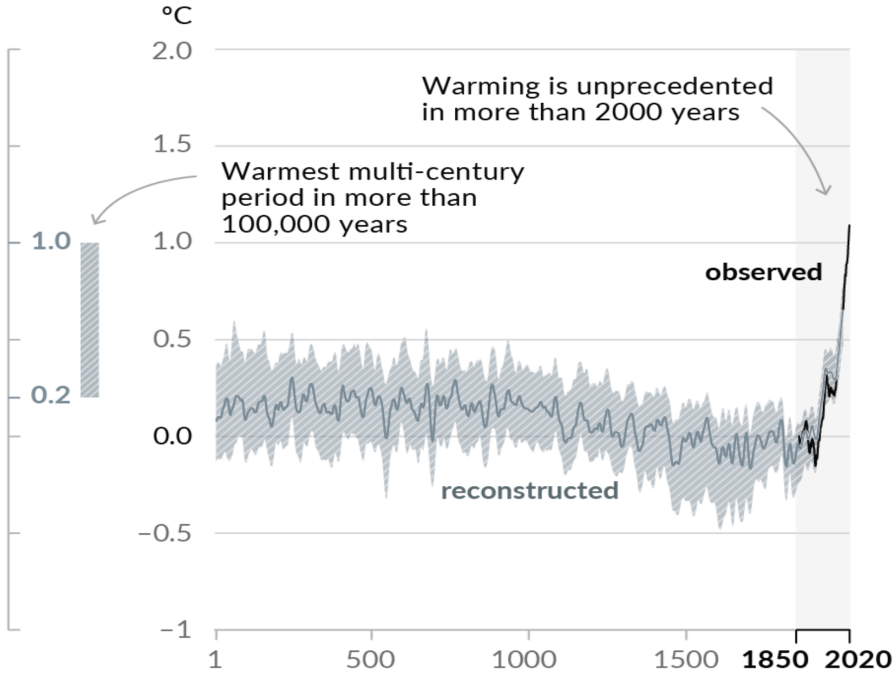
To the editor: The following two images are available for download at drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bQ-rk4C9Cw7NsThl8m9oV8MI0fMn63cF?usp=sharing



The recent rapid rise in global average surface temperatures, from the Summary for Policymakers of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report Working Group I (SPM.1) ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/figures/summary-for-policymakers/figure-spm-1

Students and supporters of the CFD Movement club at Bowdoin College. Photo courtesy of Katharine Gage

This document is available at carboncashback.org/resources