

Bridging the Geezer-Young Person Gap

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At my public talks people from the street tend to be from the downhill slope of the mountain. When I mumble “a bunch of old geezers again” they don’t seem to mind. They know I’m kidding and I’m from that side of the hill, too. And they probably realize that we can’t solve this little climate matter (read: overwhelming global energy/population/poverty problem) without a major role for elderly wisdom. We also need their old bodies, but I will come to that in a minute.

Young people are a different case. They know the climate story, perhaps well enough. A growing number of them are getting involved, especially via 350.org. A reporter noted that in his town there were active 350.org and Citizen Climate Lobby (CCL) groups, but there did not seem to be contact between them. There are a few old geezers at 350 meetings, but not a lot.

That is not a problem per se. Different groups bring different things to the table. We need all of them, and there will need to be some common understandings when we get close to the endgame. As I noted in my [prior communication](#), we can only win the carbon war soon enough to avoid unacceptable casualties by carrying out the battle on several fronts simultaneously.

It is natural that a group with young person leadership will have different emphases than a group of mainly older people. For example, 350.org issues communiques in support of righteous causes in Ferguson, Missouri, and elsewhere. CCL keeps focused on revenue-neutral fee & dividend legislation. I will argue both approaches have merit.

In a moment I will put in a plug for Elders Climate Action, which has a platform that includes Carbon Fee & Dividend and EPA’s Clean Power Plan. I spend none of my energy supporting the Clean Power Plan, yet I agree that it is a rational step that puts pressure on conservatives that may help lead to the essential solution, an across-the-board rising carbon fee. As long as the limitations of the Clean Power Plan are recognized, support for it can be helpful.

Most conservatives, privately, agree that they could support a revenue-neutral carbon fee. Their first choice is to use the revenue to reduce taxes that they don’t like, and they can dredge up some economists to support that. This is where the discipline of CCL becomes important, because the carbon fee will continue to rise only if the money is distributed broadly to the public.

Discipline is also needed in United Nations negotiations. Beware “indulgences” schemes that provide funds to developing countries while allowing developed country emissions to continue, presumably “offset” by developing country actions. Pope Francis is right, indulgences are bad. Developing countries are owed assistance; its delivery should be contingent on evidence that they are protecting their forests and soils, which is in their best interest as well as the world’s.

However, the climate problem can be solved only if there is an across-the-board rising domestic carbon fee or tax in developing countries as well as developed countries. Unrealistic in developing countries? It is essential. Or the problem will not be solved.

Think about a carbon fee for a country like India (or China or the U.S.; China, the U.S. and India are the three greatest fossil fuel emitters, together emitting almost 50% of the global total.) (1) Carbon fee & dividend provides a small reduction of wealth disparity, as it is moderately progressive. (2) The common person will see air pollution declining; he will correctly feel that he is part of the solution, and be less likely to protest and blame the government for the bad air.

It is plausible that a developing country government will see the merits of this approach. More complex alternatives are subject to graft and special interests. A merit of fee and dividend is the simple arithmetic. Just divide the amount collected from fossil fuel companies by the number of legal residents. Everyone will know how much should be received by each person.

A common sense solution is possible, but it won't happen just because it makes sense. Different groups will need to coordinate if we are to achieve effective action soon enough.

I must admit that I have had less success in persuading young people that the difference between fee-and-dividend and more complex schemes, such as cap-and-trade-with-offsets, really matters. I suppose that is not surprising when an economist explains the difference by saying "a carbon fee guarantees a specified rate of increase of carbon cost, while cap-and-trade guarantees a specified rate of reduction of emissions". What hogwash. What cap-and-trade guarantees is that the rate of emission reduction will be small, it will be confined to liberal governments, will have little public pressure to raise the carbon fee, and may be discarded when a conservative government accedes to power.

However, that is a discussion topic for another day, except let me draw attention to the exceptionally clear [op-ed by Mark Reynolds](#), CCL Executive Director, on this topic.

My main purpose in this Communication is to encourage elderly people to support [Elders Climate Action](#), a national movement of elders "dedicated to using the power of our caring, our wisdom and our numbers to push for new energy policies that will reduce greenhouse gases in our atmosphere to a level consistent with life thriving on our planet."

Also consider attending the [Grandparents Climate Action Day](#) in Washington this September. Or help with a local event. Or at least join their campaign (www.eldersclimateaction.org) and thus keep informed of ways that you might get involved in the future.

O.K., so I didn't say how to bridge the geezer-young person gap, but I can announce that our long overdue paper "Ice Melt, Sea Level Rise, and Superstorms" is accepted for publication. I need to focus on writing a Communication on that topic. If you come to the Grandparents Climate Action Day, where I will be giving a talk, maybe you can impart some wisdom about how to bridge the geezer-young person gap.