



Wheels of Justice

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The wheels of justice turn slowly, but they turn. The judicial branch of government can be agonizingly slow, yet lawsuits form a crucial front in the fight to assure a healthy climate and a bright future for young people and future generations.

Lawsuits against governments receive attention, deservedly so. Our government is violating Constitutional rights of young people such as equal protection of the law and due process.

Dan Galpern, my legal adviser, and I [argued at the recent COP25 meeting in Madrid](#) that it is important to put increased emphasis on lawsuits against the fossil fuel industry.

My reason for such a focus is not to punish the industry, even though they may deserve it. I am more interested in climate solutions, and the fossil fuel industry has the resources to become a big part of the solutions, if they redirect resources toward clean energy.

We cannot count on the government to do the investment and R&D fast enough. Better innovation potential exists in the private sector, which the government should encourage. An example is space launch capability. NASA, predictably, became a government bureaucracy. However, there were people in NASA smart enough to foster the private sector. Result: we have innovative capabilities such as Space X, with launch costs reduced a factor of 10 – we no longer need to rely on Russia to launch our heavy payloads!

In my remarks at COP25, I pointed out that the President of Exxon Research and Engineering in 1982 correctly described the climate threat: the climate system is characterized by a delayed response and amplifying feedbacks. Together these imply an urgency for anticipatory actions.

The obvious, crucial required action was development of carbon-free energy. Instead, Exxon chose to invest in ‘fracking’ and continued reliance on fuels of ever greater climate footprint. They complemented this with a disinformation campaign, including a pretense that they were working hard on clean coal and renewables, as I noted in [Fire on Planet Earth](#), while knowing full well that global fossil fuel emissions would continue to rise.

How can we get industry to become a big part of the solution? A combination of carrot and stick is needed. A rising carbon fee will provide the carrot – momentum for that is growing – we even have Presidential candidates in the U.S. who actually understand carbon fee & dividend.

The stick can be lawsuits against the fossil fuel industry, for example as Dan Galpern discussed at COP25. Dan and I have been working together for several years, via my non-profit CSAS.inc, which is separate from the CSAS (Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions) program that I direct within the Columbia University Earth Institute. CSAS.inc permits us to pursue legal cases, such as the recent ones listed on the [eyechart](#), and CSAS.inc also allows us to avoid overhead costs. I will mention some of these cases in upcoming Communications.

Most of these past and ongoing cases tend to be defensive, e.g., efforts to block expansion of coal mining, tar sands development or deforestation. We need to put more effort into offense.

Given the tremendous public support that we received recently ([It's A Wonderful Life](#)) for CSAS, I am reluctant to seek support again in 2019 – but those who have not given, or who wish to contribute specifically to our litigation efforts, may wish to contribute to CSAS.inc. directly at <https://donorbox.org/support-climate-science-awareness-and-solutions>. Instructions for gift checks and wire transfers are available [here](#). Eunbi (ej2347@columbia.edu) can provide additional information if you have any questions on how to contribute.