

Fig. 1. Local July temperature trends (°C/decade) since 1970.

July 2022 Temperature Update & A Turning Point

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People in Central and Southern Europe, Northern Africa, and the Middle East realize that their summer climate is becoming noticeably hotter (Fig. 1). And there is already more warming “in the pipeline” due to existing greenhouse gas (GHG) amounts than the warming that has occurred so far, as we describe in a paper (“Global Warming in the Pipeline”) near completion. Moreover, GHGs will continue to increase for decades because the gases are primarily a product of energy use and other activities that are essential to the health and well-being of a still-growing global population.

The U.S. Congress finally passed a climate bill, but it is a turning point only in the sense that it will help expose what is actually needed to address climate change. The bill will help reduce U.S. emissions of greenhouse gases, but the maximum impact will be a 15% reduction from 2005 emissions, according to a Princeton University analysis.¹ The remainder of the hoped-for 40-50% decrease in U.S. emissions since 2005 consists of the reduction that has already been achieved plus reduction that would have occurred in the absence of the climate bill. And much of the 15% is dubious, e.g., expectation of large-scale carbon capture and storage. Also, planned wind and solar expansion is likely to encounter public concern about the scale of the environmental footprint, and there will be opposition to expansion of transmission lines.

In 2019, 15 former Chairs of the Council of Economic Advisers, 4 Chairs of the Federal Reserve, 2 Secretaries of the U.S. Department of Treasury, and 27 Nobel Laureate Economists wrote: “Global climate change is a serious problem calling for immediate national action. Guided by sound economic principles, we are united in the following policy recommendations. I. A carbon tax offers the most cost-effective lever to reduce carbon emissions at the scale and speed that is necessary..., II. A carbon tax should increase every year until emissions reductions goals are met and be revenue neutral to avoid debate over the size of government... III. A sufficiently robust and gradually rising carbon tax will replace the need for various carbon regulations that are less efficient. Substituting a price signal for cumbersome regulations will promote economic growth and provide the regulatory certainty companies need for long-term investment in clean-energy alternatives. IV. To prevent carbon leakage and to protect U.S. competitiveness, a border tax adjustment should be established... V. To maximize the fairness and political viability of a rising carbon tax, all the revenue should be returned directly to U.S. citizens through equal lump-sum rebates. The majority of American families, including the most vulnerable, will benefit financially by receiving more in ‘carbon dividends’ than they pay in increased energy prices.”

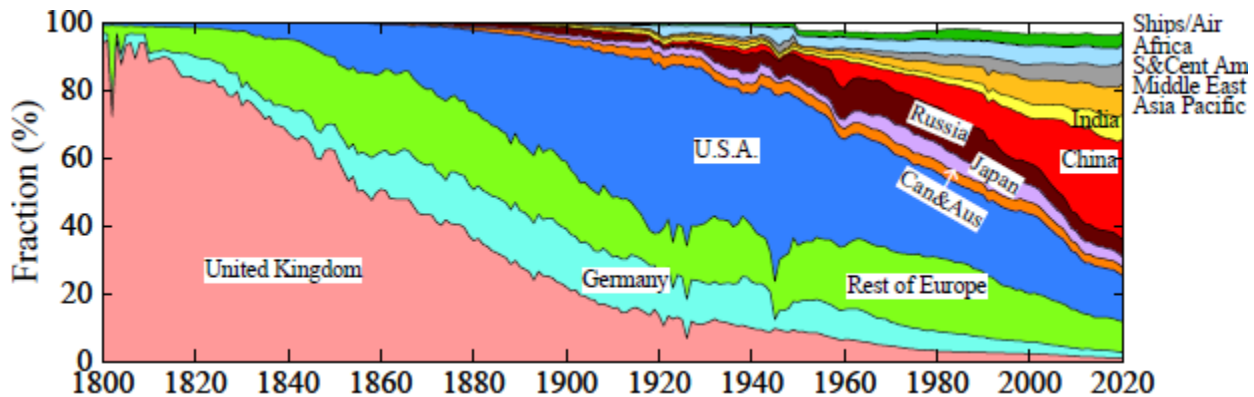


Fig. 2. Fossil fuel CO₂ emissions by region.

Why has this approach not been adopted? In early 2009, shortly after Barack Obama took office, I entreated Senator John Kerry, Obama’s point person on climate policy, to pursue carbon fee-and-dividend. He responded sadly² “I can’t get one vote for that.” Instead, he had to allow all Senators and Representatives an opportunity to insert passages in the bill provided by special interests. That “Christmas tree” bill didn’t pass, but the present one did under the pseudonym “Inflation Reduction Act.” It’s probably possible to find an economist or two defending the Christmas tree approach, with something like “that’s the way sausages are made.” Hogwash. The fossil fuel industry is smiling all the way to the bank. Until we understand this, we are all Colonel Nicholson.²

Fortunately, a growing number of young people understand the situation.^{3,4} Older people need to work with them; the problem cannot be solved as long as we only have political parties that accept money from special financial interests.⁵ The turning point may be closer than you think. In the 2022 elections in the United States, a number of states are beginning to employ ranked voting system,⁵ which is essential if a political party that accepts no funding from special interests – and instead focuses on what the public wants – is to have the opportunity to rise.

Climate change is a global matter. U.S. emissions, as a percent of global emissions, have been declining for years (Fig. 2). Recent U.S. emissions are about 14% of the global total, so the likely impact of the Christmas tree bill will be of the order of 1% of global emissions. This hardly warrants a euphoric response from young people, especially when they realize that the financing of the bill is largely being borrowed from them. The U.S. budget is far in the red this year; any closing of tax loopholes and catching of tax cheats should be used to reduce borrowing from our children.

We must work with China to solve the climate problem.⁶ China did not cause climate change; the West is responsible for most of the excess CO₂ in the air today. However, China is now the biggest source of emissions (Fig. 2) and will be so in the future. The two major political parties in the U.S. presently compete with each other, foolishly, to see who can be “tougher” on China. Here, too, we need a fresh 3rd party approach focused on the principles on which the nation was founded. There is a great opportunity here to contribute to definition of the platform for such a party.⁵

At least one turning point has been reached: the first author (JEH) has seen enough of the U.S. administration’s policies that he can finally finish the overdue “Sophie’s Planet.”

¹ REPEAT, Rapid Energy Policy Evaluation and Analysis Toolkit, Princeton University Zero Lab, [Preliminary Report: The Climate and Energy Impacts of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022](#).

² Draft Chapter 44, [Tell the President the Whole Truth](#), of *Sophie’s Planet*, plus lead in page.

³ [Student Leadership on Climate Solutions](#) 31 July 2020

⁴ [Can Young People Save Democracy and the Planet?](#) 8 October 2021 communication.

⁵ [A Realistic Path to a Bright Future](#) 3 December 2021 communication.

⁶ Draft Chapter 47, [China and the Global Solution](#), of *Sophie’s Planet*, plus lead in page.