

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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We Have an Obligation to Provide for the Future

Five years ago, I wrote an article titled "Why Are We Spending Our Future?" where I presented a financial analogy relative to the environment. Government bodies strapped for cash have sold a stream of future earnings to obtain and spend cash for today. In the same respect, we are doing something similar whereby we are consuming natural resources today that will deprive future generations of their needs.

It is no wonder that two teenagers recently filed a suit against the governor of Oregon for not living up to trusteeship obligations to young people. They asked him to make a plan to phase down Oregon's CO₂ emissions at a rate science indicates is necessary to stabilize the climate this century. The suit was actually filed by Our Children's Trust (OCT) on behalf of the two teenagers. OCT has developed a mission to establish the legal right to a healthy atmosphere and stable climate for all present and future generations. Unless the State of Oregon and other west coast states take the lead to reduce carbon emissions, the earth's temperature will certainly increase 2°C. well before the turn of the century causing many disasters like droughts and coastal floods. And this will have a huge detrimental impact on the lives of everyone, including the youth that filed the suit.

The west coast states, particularly California which has the seventh largest economy in the world, have the opportunity to be saviors of the planet and heroes to the youth of today and future generations. They can set an example to the rest of the U.S. and other countries that carbon emissions must be reduced very soon. According to James Hansen, who is considered by many as the top U.S. climatologist, stabilization of the climate is possible if coal plants are phased out in the next few decades, meaning no new coal-fired or gas-fired power plants, and no unconventional fuel sources like tar sands or tar shale.

In addition to phasing out fossil fuels over the next 20-30 years, Hansen proposes a large carbon fee of about \$100 per ton imposed on the fossil fuel companies at their domestic mines or ports of entry. The fee would be passed on to all legal residents electronically through bank accounts or debit cards but limited to four people per family. In this manner those people that are more frugal in fossil fuel consumption would come out ahead as they would receive a larger payment than the fee paid during the year.

A fee of \$100 per ton of carbon would probably increase the price of gasoline by \$1 per gallon, but with the price of oil and gas currently being very low, this is a good time to impose

the fee. Without the carbon fee, the price of gas would eventually increase anyway by this amount, but in that case the extra dollar would go to the energy companies. By imposing this carbon fee, the additional cost of gasoline would be returned to the U.S. citizens. This would encourage everyone to consume less, leading to a surplus of oil and gas and thus maintaining low base prices.

Just asking everyone to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels in order to reduce carbon emissions is problematic. People do not change unless they begin to experience events that will soon be catastrophic, and then it may be too late. It is very critical that we start immediately to make the necessary changes in order to provide for the future of our children and grandchildren, and their children and grandchildren. As I have indicated before, if we eventually learn that climate change doesn't really exist, the only downside is that it may have cost everyone more money unnecessarily. If we don't take action now and it is eventually confirmed that climate change is real, the future may easily be catastrophic. So let's act conscientiously and provide for the future.