

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

by  
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## **What is the Future of Our Global Warming Problem?**

About two months ago, James Hansen and his wife, Anniek, sent a letter to Michelle and Barack Obama relative to the Earth that will be inherited by our children, grandchildren, and those yet to be born. James Hansen heads the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and is considered one of the top researchers in climate change.

Hansen has advised the various governments through the appropriate means of communications but due to a lack of the necessary initiatives, he feels that the urgency requires a personal appeal. Basically, there is a profound disconnect between what is being considered and what is required for the preservation of the planet. In his letter, Hansen made three specific recommendations.

Coal is responsible for as much atmospheric carbon dioxide as the other fossil fuels combined, and because of the huge reserves coal power plants continue to be built. China will be opening a coal-fired power plant every ten days for the next seven years. Carbon dioxide levels will certainly approach 500 ppm (parts per million) and will cause the extermination of one million species. Hansen calls coal plants "factories of death". His recommendation is a moratorium and phase-out of coal plants that do not capture and store the carbon dioxide.

One of the best ways to reduce carbon emissions is to apply a carbon tax with a 100% dividend. The price of carbon will continue to increase with time in order to have everyone reduce its impact on carbon dioxide emissions. The tax will be returned to the public on an equal per capita basis with half-shares for children up to a maximum of two child-shares per family. The money would be deposited in bank accounts on a monthly basis. Anyone who conserves energy and reduces his/her carbon footprint more than the average will make money. Persons with a large cars and big houses will pay a tax much greater than the dividend. People will lean toward purchasing goods that emit low carbon emissions as they will be much cheaper. For instance, it will encourage the purchase of food from nearby farms rather than imports from other parts of the world. Just think what it will do to illegal immigration if everyone pays the tax but only legal citizens receive a dividend.

So if we can't build coal-fired power plants, where will we obtain our electrical power? Hansen's recommendation is the development of fourth generation nuclear power (4thGNP). Most people are recommending renewable energy (wind, solar, geothermal, biofuels) but that will probably take 25 years before they have a major positive impact. A huge infusion of R&D money for 4thGNP could very well be the answer as it would solve most of the past problems or current nuclear power. Existing

nuclear reactors use less than 1% of the energy in uranium, leaving more than 99% as long-lived nuclear waste. However, 4thGNP can “burn” that waste, and leave a small volume of waste with a half-life of decades rather than thousands of years. It has been asserted that 4thGNP cannot be ready until 2030, but Hansen believes that a real commitment will make it possible much sooner. In the past, nuclear energy projects have taken about 20 years, primarily because of permitting delays. For Hansen to be that optimistic will require a major change in America’s attitude toward nuclear energy.

Countries like Japan and Germany agreed to comply with the Kyoto Protocol and accepted the strongest emission reduction targets. Both countries, however, have continued to build coal plants and their emissions continue to increase.

The three big environmental issues today are energy, water and climate change. These challenges are great and urgent and they require immediate attention. President Obama should take the leadership and explain to the rest of the world what is needed to solve these problems.