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**Pope’s call to act on climate change must be heeded by Congress**

*Inspired by Francis’ challenge to care for creation and protect the poor, Republicans and Democrats should come together on legislation that provides a market-based solution to global warming: Place a fee on carbon and give the revenue back to households.*

With the release of his much-anticipated encyclical, “Laudato Si” (Praised Be), Pope Francis has raised the stakes on climate change, reframing the issue as a moral imperative for which all, especially wealthy nations, are responsible.

The Pope is telling the world that we are called upon to be good stewards of God’s creation and turn away from behavior that alters the Earth’s climate and puts the world’s poor and most vulnerable at risk.

From a report in [The Guardian](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/15/pope-francis-destruction-ecosystem-leaked-encyclical?CMP=share_btn_tw), based on a leaked draft of the encyclical:

“Humanity is called to take note of the need for changes in lifestyle and changes in methods of production and consumption to combat this warming, or at least the human causes that produce and accentuate it,” he wrote in the draft. “Numerous scientific studies indicate that the greater part of the global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases … given off above all because of human activity…”

…At the start of the draft essay, the pope wrote, the Earth “is protesting for the wrong that we are doing to her, because of the irresponsible use and abuse of the goods that God has placed on her. We have grown up thinking that we were her owners and dominators, authorized to loot her. The violence that exists in the human heart, wounded by sin, is also manifest in the symptoms of illness that we see in the Earth, the water, the air and in living things.”

He immediately makes clear, moreover, that unlike previous encyclicals, this one is directed to everyone, regardless of religion. “Faced with the global deterioration of the environment, I want to address every person who inhabits this planet,” the pope wrote. “In this encyclical, I especially propose to enter into discussion with everyone regarding our common home.”

As momentum moves toward a global climate agreement in Paris at the end of the year, Francis’ message is timed to pressure world leaders to make the strongest commitments for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. To that end, the Pontiff will [speak before the United Nations](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/19/world/europe/pope-francis-to-speak-united-nations-annual-gathering-world-leaders.html) General Assembly in New York on September 25 and to [a joint session of the U.S. Congress](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2015/02/05/pope-francis-to-visit-capitol-on-sept-24/) on September 24.

But when the Pope arrives in Washington this fall, will he find a Congress that is actively engaged in solving the climate crisis or one that is obstructing any attempt to deal with the problem?

In lieu of legislation to reduce heat-trapping emissions, President Obama has been forced to turn to the Environmental Protection Agency to develop and [implement regulations](http://www.ucsusa.org/our-work/global-warming/reduce-emissions/what-is-the-clean-power-plan#.VX22mBNViko) to restrict carbon-dioxide emissions at power plants. Those rules are due to be finalized this summer, and the President is now asking the EPA to develop regulations to reduce emissions in the [trucking](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/31/business/energy-environment/epa-proposal-will-put-bigger-trucks-on-a-fuel-diet.html) and [airline](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/11/business/energy-environment/epa-says-it-will-set-rules-for-airplane-emissions.html) industries.

Republicans in Congress want less, not more, government regulation, and so [legislation is being considered](http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/243478-house-gop-sets-up-june-votes-on-epa-bills-chemical-reform) to block or delay implementation of new EPA rules. These efforts, though, will ultimately prove futile, as the President will surely veto such legislation, and Republicans lack the two-thirds majority to override any veto.

Instead of wasting time and effort to block EPA rules, why not present the President with an alternative solution, one that conservatives would find far more palatable than expanding federal regulations?

Many conservatives, such as former [Secretary of State George Shultz](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-reagan-model-on-climate-change/2015/03/13/4f4182e2-c6a8-11e4-b2a1-bed1aaea2816_story.html), favor the market-based solution of a steadily-rising fee on carbon with revenue returned to households. Coupled with border-adjustment tariffs to protect American businesses, this approach, known as Carbon Fee and Dividend, uses market forces to drive the transition away from fossil fuels. Such legislation would make new EPA rules unnecessary.

A study from the highly-respected Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI), examined the impact of a fee on the CO2 content of fossil fuels, starting at $10 per ton of CO2 and increasing by $10 per ton each year. Revenue from the fee was returned in equal shares to all households. Border adjustment tariffs on imports from nations that don’t price carbon were also factored in.

The [REMI study](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/remi-report/) found that after 20 years:

* CO2 emissions would be reduced 50 percent below 1990 levels.
* Because of the economic stimulus of recycling carbon fee revenue back to households, 2.8 million jobs would be added to the American economy.
* Improved air quality would result in 230,000 premature deaths avoided.

Up until now, the big concern among Republicans about efforts to limit carbon emissions is that they will have a detrimental effect on the economy. The REMI study, however, shows that with the right approach, the opposite is true: Pricing carbon can actually improve the economy.

The REMI study also found that Carbon Fee and Dividend (CF&D) achieves much better results than the regulation-based Clean Power Plan (CPP). The EPA rules are designed to reduce emissions from power plants by 30% below 2005 levels by the year 2030. REMI estimates that CF&D would achieve a 90% reduction below 2005 levels in the power sector by 2030 (see chart below).



Now that the Pope has laid out the moral argument to address climate change, it’s time for Republicans and Democrats to come together on a solution that both sides can agree on. Carbon Fee and Dividend is that solution for a number of reasons:

* It is revenue neutral, which means it won’t increase the size of government.
* It will add jobs to the economy and protect low- and middle-income households from increased energy costs associated with the fee.
* It achieves the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions needed to avoid the worst effects of climate change.
* It allows the free market, rather than the government, to pick the winners and losers among emerging clean technologies.
* Provides the motivation, through border adjustments, for other nations to follow our lead with carbon-pricing systems of their own.
* Allows for the phase out of government subsidies on ALL types of energy.

The title of Pope Francis’ encyclical, “Laudoto Si” or “Praised Be,” comes from St. Francis’ Canticle of the Sun, which gives praise to God for such creations as “Brother Fire,” “Sister Water,” “Mother Earth,” and so on.

Should lawmakers in Washington enact a climate solution like Carbon Fee and Dividend, perhaps Pope Francis will be inspired to add a line to the Canticle: Praised be God for the American Congress, which has acted to protect the earth and its people.