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**MEDIA PACKET FOR SEPTEMBER 11, 2015**

**Climate change and Pope Francis’ visit with Congress**

*His appearance before a joint session of the U.S. House and Senate on Sept. 24 should be viewed as an opportunity to begin a bipartisan conversation about solving humanity’s biggest problem.*

When [Pope Francis speaks before a joint session of Congress](http://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/pope-francis-addresses-congress-2015-visit-planning-119840) later this month, he will carry with him the hopes and prayers of people everywhere that humanity will finally take the steps necessary to secure a livable world for future generations.

His speech in Washington, followed the next day by an appearance before the U.N. General Assembly, comes less than 10 weeks before the opening of the COP21 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris. At that meeting, it is hoped an agreement will be reached committing 196 nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions enough to avoid the [worst-case scenarios](http://news.discovery.com/earth/global-warming/climate-catastrophes-worst-case-scenarios-150724.htm) of climate change.

One of those worst-case scenarios is the displacement of millions of people throughout the world as water and [food shortages create instability](http://www.carbonbrief.org/blog/2015/03/scientists-discuss-the-role-of-climate-change-in-the-syrian-civil-war) and force people to make desperate migrations. The tragic [plight of migrants](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/18/mass-migration-crisis-refugees-climate-change) currently seeking refuge in Mediterranean countries is a foretaste of what lies ahead as conditions worsen.

The human suffering that results from climate change is at the heart of the message Francis will bring to Congress. In his encyclical, “Laudato Si,” released earlier this summer, the Pope said:

“Its [climate change’s] worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades. Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry.”

Our current business-as-usual pace of burning fossil fuels places us on a [trajectory of warming](http://climatica.org.uk/ipcc-long-term-climate-projections) that ensures the current nightmare of the migrant crisis will grow to unimaginable proportions. To avoid that bleak scenario, the world must drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which is the aim of the Paris accord.

The success of the Paris agreement hinges on commitments the United States is willing to make. Other nations will follow our lead on emissions reductions and so the U.S. pledge must be sufficient to the task.

Lacking any initiative from Congress to curb carbon emissions, President Obama is using the tools at his disposal to take much-needed action and bring a strong commitment to Paris. This summer, the President rolled out the [Clean Power Plan](http://www2.epa.gov/cleanpowerplan/clean-power-plan-existing-power-plants), which will utilize EPA regulations to reduce CO2 emissions from power plants 32 percent by 2030.

But the new EPA regulations have [come under fire](http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/252940-mcconnell-the-battle-continues-against-power-plant-rules) from opponents in Congress. Clearly, a “Just say no” response to the new rules is not a viable option.

And that’s why the Pope’s visit on Sept. 24 is so important. Throughout our history, the United States has been far more resolute and effective when we respond to threats as one nation. Until now, however, the climate change crisis has been met with divisiveness and a response that only half our government embraces.

Francis, who carries the moral authority of being the leader of the world’s largest Christian denomination, offers our elected officials the opportunity to hit the “reset” button on the climate change conversation happening in Washington. In his encyclical, the Pope said:

“I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.”

When all parties become earnestly engaged in that conversation, the talk must turn to solutions that are acceptable to both Republicans and Democrats.

And what might such a solution look like?

Many conservatives, among them former Reagan Secretary of State [George Shultz](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-reagan-model-on-climate-change/2015/03/13/4f4182e2-c6a8-11e4-b2a1-bed1aaea2816_story.html), believe the best option is the market-based approach of a revenue-neutral carbon fee. If the revenue from that fee is returned equitably to all households, this approach will actually grow our economy, removing the biggest concern that conservatives have about carbon pricing.

Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI), [conducted a study](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/remi-report/) on this policy, known as [Carbon Fee and Dividend](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/carbon-fee-and-dividend/), calculating an annual increase of $10 per ton on the carbon dioxide content of fossil fuels. REMI found that emissions would be reduced 52 percent below 1990 levels after 20 years. The other good news from the study is that the policy would add 2.8 million jobs during that time, chiefly because of the economic stimulus of recycling the carbon fee revenue back into the economy.

Carbon Fee and Dividend also employs border tariffs on imports from nations that do not similarly price carbon, thereby maintaining a level playing field for American businesses. Cross off another concern about carbon pricing.

For people of faith, the Pope’s appearance before Congress can be viewed as divine intervention at a critical moment in human history. Let’s hope this intervention sparks a dialogue that leads to effective solutions to the climate crisis to preserve a livable world for, as Pope Francis would say, all our brothers and sisters.

Excerpts from the Pope’s encyclical

On Sept. 24, Pope Francis will address a joint session of Congress. In June, the Pope released his encyclical, “[Laudato Si](http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/holy-see/francis/pope-francis-encyclical-laudato-si-on-environment.cfm),” which provides a preview of what might be expected in his address to Congress. Here are some excerpts on various topics:

**On the causes of climate change:** “Numerous scientific studies indicate that most of the global warming in recent decades it is due to the large concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxide and others) mainly emitted due to human activity.”

**Consequences of climate change:** “Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades. Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry.”

**The urgency to act falls on all humanity:** "The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone... Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change."

**What needs to be done:** “It is urgent to develop policy so that in the coming years, we drastically reduce carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gas emissions, by, for example, replacing fossil fuels and developing renewable energy sources.”

**The faith perspective:** “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”

**What we owe to future generations:** “Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs forsubsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.”

**There is hope:** "Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start."