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**Breaking the partisan impasse in Congress on climate change**

*A ground-breaking resolution from Chris Gibson and ten other House Republicans is an important step in moving toward a bipartisan solution.*

There are hopeful signs that the current impasse in Congress over climate change may be coming to an end.

As Washington awaits a much anticipated [visit from Pope Francis](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/20/us/politics/for-gop-pope-franciss-visit-to-congress-comes-with-tensions.html), who is expected to speak about the moral imperative to tackle global warming in his address to a joint session of the House and Senate on Sept. 24, a Republican congressman has [introduced a resolution](http://gibson.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=398414) that acknowledges the problem of climate change and calls upon Congress to work on solutions.

Climate resolution

sponsors

Rep. Chris Gibson (NY-19)

Rep. Ryan Costello (PA-06)

Rep. Carlos Curbelo (FL-26)

Rep. Bob Dold (IL-10)

Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick (PA-8)

Rep. Richard Hanna (NY-22)

Rep. Patrick Meehan (PA-7)

Rep. David Reichert (WA-7)

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-

27)

Rep. Elise Stefanik (NY-21)

Rep. Frank LoBiondo (NJ-02)

On Sept. 17, Rep. Chris Gibson (R-NY) introduced House Resolution 424 “Expressing the commitment of the House of Representatives to conservative environmental stewardship.” Ten other Republicans cosponsored the Gibson resolution, which points to the consequences of climate change, both now and in the future:

“This has had noticeable, negative impacts that are expected to worsen in every region of the United States and its territories, including, among other significant weather events and environmental disruptions, longer and hotter heat waves, more severe storms, worsening flood and drought cycles, growing invasive species and insect problems, threatened native plant and wildlife populations, rising sea levels, and, when combined with a lack of proper forest management, increased wildfire risk.”

The resolution concludes with a call to action:

“Resolved, that the House of Representatives commits to working constructively, using our tradition of American ingenuity, innovation, and exceptionalism, to create and support economically viable, and broadly supported private and public solutions to study and address the causes and effects of measured changes to our global and regional climates, including mitigation efforts and efforts to balance human activities that have been found to have an impact.”

Though the resolution is non-binding, its significance is huge in that it turns down the heat, so to speak, on the climate issue and opens the space for a meaningful dialogue. It comes one week before the visit of Pope Francis, who made a plea for this type of dialogue in his [encyclical](http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/holy-see/francis/pope-francis-encyclical-laudato-si-on-environment.cfm) back in June:

“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.”

The resolution also creates a stepping stone that allows congressional Republicans to engage in the issue and come to the table with conservative solutions to climate change, such as a revenue-neutral carbon fee. Other Republicans should be encouraged to support the resolution, and the House leadership should allow it to come to the floor for a vote.

Republicans are starting to realize the value of being engaged on climate solutions. Former Republican Congressman Bob Inglis said in a [recent op-ed](http://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/08/15/bob-inglis-just-say-epas-climate-rules/31730109/), “If you're not at the table, you're on the menu. By not being engaged, the GOP has ceded climate-change policy to an executive branch that is imposing more government regulations, the least desirable solution Republicans can imagine.”

The specific government regulation Inglis alludes to, of course, is President Obama’s [Clean Power Plan](http://www2.epa.gov/cleanpowerplan/clean-power-plan-existing-power-plants) launched earlier this summer, which creates rules to limit greenhouse gas emissions from electrical generation facilities. Lacking any initiative from Congress to curb carbon emissions, the President is using the tools at his disposal to take much-needed action in advance of a critical [climate change meeting](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/02/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-paris-climate-summit-and-un-talks) this December in Paris. At that time, nations of the world are expected to sign onto a global agreement to reduce heat-trapping emissions, and a strong commitment from the U.S. is essential to secure similar commitments from other countries.

The new EPA regulations have come under fire from opponents in Congress. But a “Just say no” response to the new rules is not a viable option, given the [consequences of a business-as-usual scenario](http://riskybusiness.org/reports/national-report/executive-summary).

A better option for Republicans would be to offer a market-based solution such as a [fee on carbon with revenue returned to households](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/carbon-fee-and-dividend/).

Such a solution would appear to align with the principles laid out in the Gibson resolution, which calls for prudent “stewardship of our economy and our environment:”

“Any efforts to mitigate the risks of, prepare for, or otherwise address our changing climate and its effects should not constrain the United States economy, especially in regards to global competitiveness.”

Rather than constrain the economy, the approach known as Carbon Fee and Dividend would actually grow our economy. Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI), [conducted a study](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/remi-report/) on this policy, 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.

With regard to “global competitiveness,” 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.

Leading conservatives like [George Shultz](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-reagan-model-on-climate-change/2015/03/13/4f4182e2-c6a8-11e4-b2a1-bed1aaea2816_story.html), Secretary of State under President Reagan, have endorsed this solution, calling it an “insurance policy” against the risk posed by climate change.

Even before the Gibson resolution, there were indications that the conversation about climate change was shifting.

Back in January, when the Senate was considering a bill authorizing the Keystone XL pipeline, several [amendments about climate change](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/tipping-point-carbon-pricing-just-got-closer/) came up for a vote. One of those amendments affirmed that climate change is real and human activity contributes to it. Fifteen Republican senators voted yes on the amendment. Another amendment stated that human activity contributes “significantly” to climate change, and five GOP senators voted yes.

In late June, Citizens’ Climate Lobby sent 800 volunteers to Capitol Hill to meet with more than 500 congressional offices. In most of the meetings with Republicans, there was no pushback on the science of climate change.

As CCL Executive Director Mark Reynolds [wrote in an op-ed](http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865631912/Everything-you-think-you-know-about-Republicans-and-climate-change-is-wrong.html?pg=all) earlier this summer:

In meeting after meeting with Republican offices, the unspoken agreement seemed to be: “Let’s not argue about the science; let’s talk about solutions and where we might find common ground.”

The Gibson resolution is a sign that the partisan divide on climate change has narrowed. The first step to solving a problem is to acknowledge that one exists, and Gibson’s resolution offers Republicans an opportunity to re-enter the conversation in a productive manner.

With [97 percent of climate scientists](https://www.skepticalscience.com/global-warming-scientific-consensus.htm) convinced, based upon the evidence, that human-caused global warming is happening, the only debate we should have is what to do about it.

Gibson and his Republican colleagues who sponsored the resolution have courageously stepped up. Let us acknowledge and celebrate their leadership and urge other Republicans to follow their lead so that, as the resolution states, “we preserve our great Nation for future generations.”

Excerpts from 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."