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Saving N.E. seasons (and Earth's climate) starts in Durban

By Gary Rucinski, Founder, Citizens Climate Lobby Boston Chapter

I was born in New Jersey but, when it comes to the weather, I am New England Yankee through and through.

After my family moved to Massachusetts, my grandfather taught me how to garden. My childhood was defined by the cycle of planting in spring, watering and weeding in summer, and harvesting in fall. I remember the sweetness of homegrown strawberries, the snap of fresh beans, and the taste of my grandmother's green tomato relish made with the last pickings from the vine. To this day, I feel the appreciation that gardening instilled in me for the New England seasons.

Sadly, we no longer have the seasons I grew up with. As scientists predicted, our climate has changed. Seasons in New England today are more like those of northern New Jersey in the early sixties. By late this century, if we don't act, [New England seasons will be like those of present day South Carolina.](#) Should we live so long, my wife will rejoice at this change, but I will mourn the loss of the seasons of my childhood.



If the New England seasons were the only potential loss due to climate change, there might be little urgency to act. But this year, the U.S. experienced the bitter taste of what climate change will bring. We've seen devastating fires in drought-stricken Texas; tornadoes and a freak October snowstorm that dumped 30" of snow in western Massachusetts; and massive floods along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. [Extreme weather events overall caused \\$50B in damages in 2011.](#)

As the reality of climate change has been sinking in, the case advanced by climate change deniers has been collapsing. Richard Mueller, a former skeptic, [announced results confirming the scientific consensus on global](#)

warming. Simultaneously, a clear winner was also emerging as the best policy option for addressing climate change.

The consensus policy approach is to put a tax on the carbon in fossil fuels. Called a carbon tax, it is viewed in countries around the globe and by economists across the ideological spectrum as the most effective way to wean ourselves off of fossil fuels that cause climate change. This year Australia passed a carbon tax that will raise the price of energy but cut income taxes by an equivalent amount. British Columbia has been operating with a similar tax for four years. South Africa's National Treasury concluded, "Carbon taxes afford firms the flexibility to undertake emissions reductions according to their specific processes and provide the long-term price certainty which is essential for investment decisions."

In the U.S., Senators Maria Cantwell and Susan Collins submitted the CLEAR Act in the last Congress. This act proposed auctioning carbon shares that gradually increase in price. Seventy five percent of auction proceeds would have been returned directly to households. In October, Representative Pete Stark and eight cosponsors submitted the Save Our Climate Act. This bill would put a gradually increasing tax on carbon. It would return most proceeds to households and use a portion to reduce the national debt.

It may seem nonsensical to tax carbon on the one hand and refund nearly the same amount to consumers. We have seen, however, that Americans change their habits when energy gets more expensive. Also, private investment in the clean tech and alternative energy sectors increases when costs for energy rise.

The guarantee of a gradually increasing carbon tax will give consumers and businesses the predictability they need to justify the investments that will jumpstart the transition to a clean energy economy. Refunds will allow all Americans to purchase the energy they need during the transition.

With no doubt remaining on the science, the daily news reminding us of damages to come, and an emerging global consensus on the most effective policy proposal, now is the time to act. The current international conference on climate change, COP17, in Durban, South Africa, presents an opportunity to do so. The Obama Administration should go to COP17 and signal its support for a U.S. carbon tax, then come home and work to pass one in the current Congress. Doing so will help preserve more than just the New England seasons I have come to love.

For more information on Citizens Climate Lobby, go to www.citizensclimatelobby.org.