

Declaration of Stewardship

Whereas the climate system is nearing tipping points with likely devastating consequences for much of creation; whereas the responsibility of the United States for excess CO₂ in the air exceeds that of any other nation by more than a factor of three; whereas the rest of the world cannot be expected to take needed actions until the United States exercises responsibility and leadership; whereas, some lawmakers and executives in the United States appear to be unduly swayed by special interests; it therefore becomes important for citizens to be keenly aware of the position regarding global warming of all candidates for election.

Almost all candidates will express general agreement with the goal of minimizing dangerous human-made climate change, but it is necessary to assess intentions and loyalties. At Earthworks last week-end and at ReEnergizeIowa activity this weekend, I argue that every candidate in 2008 should be asked whether they will sign onto each of the three items in the “Declaration of Stewardship” below. The first two items relate directly to the two essential actions described in “Old King Coal II”

http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/distro_OldKingCoalII_70730.pdf

and “How Can We Avoid Dangerous Human-Made Interference with Climate”

<http://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/0706/0706.3720.pdf>

i.e., (1) phase-out of coal use except at power plants where CO₂ is captured and sequestered, and (2) a modest but slowly growing price on carbon emissions.

I will not repeat the rationale here. Some people argue that a large carbon tax is needed. However, removal of fossil fuel subsidies and supply constraints may go a long way. Certainty of a rising price is probably most important for driving innovation. Amory Lovins argues that no carbon tax or cap is needed. I do not agree with that, but I do agree that the barriers to efficiency (e.g., utilities making more money if they sell more energy) must be removed. The third item in the declaration includes that matter.

As always, criticisms and suggestions are welcome. I think that there should be no more than three items in the list and that the present ones are essentially the right ones. The actions needed to stabilize climate and preserve creation are reasonably clear. There are also the two ‘tweaks’ discussed in Old King Coal II, but these ‘tweaks’ should not be controversial; thus it seems unnecessary to ask candidates their positions thereon.

Declaration of Stewardship for the Earth and all Creation

1. Moratorium on Dirty Coal

I will support a moratorium on coal-fired power plants that do not capture and sequester CO₂.

2. Price on Carbon Emissions

I will support a fair, gradually rising, price on carbon emissions, reflecting costs to the environment. Mechanisms to adjust price should be apolitical and economically sound.

3. Energy Efficiency & Conservation Incentives

I will support measures to improve energy efficiency, e.g., rewarding utilities and others based on energy and carbon efficiencies, rather than on the amount of energy sold.