



**Fig. 1. Global Public Square airs on CNN on Sundays at 10 AM and 1 PM U.S. East Coast time.**

## **Global Problems Require a Global Solution**

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Fareed Zakaria attracts high level guests to his program because of its reach and objectivity. He lets his guests have the last word on their topic. Yet Zakaria’s interpretations of issues of the day – which he labels as “his take” – stand out as especially penetrating and insightful.

On Sunday this week Zakaria ended his program with a concise description of an effective [approach to address climate change](#) – in just a few minutes he described how [carbon fee-and-dividend](#) could be made near-global. I won’t try to summarize his take – it’s impossible to match his clarity and brevity, which includes great illustrations.

In contrast to carbon fee-and-dividend, most governments prefer the “red-tape” approach: increased government regulations with the government picking technology winners and losers.

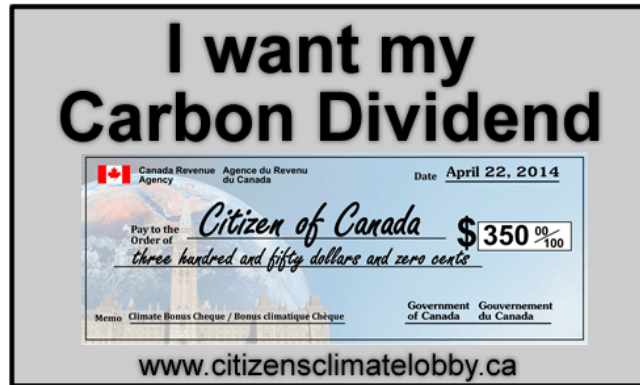
Governments have followed the red tape approach for three decades, ever since the Framework Convention on Climate Change was approved by almost all nations in 1992. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement are designed to allow all nations to follow the red tape approach within their countries. As a result, global carbon emissions have continued to rise.

The red tape approach cannot work because it ignores economics. It lets the fossil fuel industry continue to use the atmosphere – somewhere – as a free dumping ground for carbon waste. Fossil fuels might be regulated away in some nations, but the fuels will be burned elsewhere.

Fossil fuels are amazingly effective in raising living standards; one gallon (3.7 liters) of gasoline (petrol) contains the work equivalent of 400 hours of labor by a healthy adult. That beneficial property of fossil fuels – we now realize – carries with it an existential threat.

Continued carbon emissions will make low latitudes of Earth uncomfortable if not uninhabitable. Coastal cities worldwide will begin to go underwater during the lifetime of today’s young people. Emigration pressures from low latitudes and coastal regions may make the planet ungovernable, and autocratic governments will be more likely to gain and retain power.

For a time, I thought governments did not understand the climate and energy problem. But when I visited a dozen countries in 2007-2009 – as discussed in [Storms of My Grandchildren](#) – I saw the power of special interests. The fossil fuel industry liked the red-tape approach. They were



**Fig. 2. Citizens Climate Lobby in Canada advocates carbon fee-and-dividend.**

happy to see governments set long-term emission targets and adopt emission trading schemes, which reduce some national emissions but allow global emissions to remain high or even rise.

Barack Obama’s election in 2008 was promising; he spoke of a “planet in peril” in the campaign. – but his team concluded that they “could not get one vote” is the U.S. Senate for carbon fee-and-dividend. They went with the red-tape approach, as described in the drafts of chapters [42](#) and [44](#) of Sophie’s Planet, and global emissions continued to rise.

The story may yet have a happy ending, thanks largely to the insight and dedication of Marshall Saunders, as described in those two chapters. Saunders formed Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL) to advocate for carbon fee-and-dividend. CCL now has several hundred thousand members in the United States and it has spread to other nations (Fig. 2).

This year we should learn whether governments are at last serious about addressing global warming. President Biden has the authority to collect a carbon fee from the small number of ultimate sources (domestic mines and ports of entry): the Supreme Court ruled, in *Massachusetts versus EPA*, that CO<sub>2</sub> is a pollutant. EPA can impose a fee on pollutants, as my attorney Dan Galpern and I described in a [recent op-ed](#). Please consider joining and signing [our petition](#).

The danger is that President Biden will cave in to pressure from his left flank and instead push for a “green new deal” that [advocates estimate would cost trillions of dollars](#). The proposal seems to be a red-tape approach, with government picking winners and losers.

Realism implies that the green new deal is not going to happen as proposed. It will be tragic if advocates for climate justice insist on that approach. The alternative – carbon fee-and-dividend – in fact promotes social justice, as Dan Miller and I explained in an [op-ed](#) and [testimony to Congress](#). Fee-and-dividend is anti-regressive (i.e., progressive): wealthy people lose money because of their large carbon footprint, but most low-income and middle-income people come out ahead, with their dividend exceeding increased costs caused by the carbon fee.

A global problem requires a global solution. China and the U.S. are the two biggest economies and the biggest polluters. If they agree on a rising carbon fee, the climate problem can be solved.

I am optimistic that cooperation is possible. Friends, colleagues and former students in China assure us that the Chinese government realizes that we are all in the same boat and need to cooperate. The question is whether that cooperation will be achieved soon enough.