



Spare Change

THREE CHEAP AND EFFECTIVE WAYS GOVERNMENTS CAN FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

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Massive renewable energy farms.
 Sweeping public transportation megaprojects.
 Generational investment in transitioning to a post-carbon economy.
 All hopeful, all essential, and all expensive.

Governments often cite the pocketbooks of the taxpayer when explaining why they can't seem to manage our climate future. To maintain liveability, the theory goes, change must be modest and incremental.

Never has the false dichotomy between environment and economy been less true than today, of course, as governments struggle with the mounting costs of climate disasters, while the clean energy sector is an economic powerhouse, growing a third faster than Canada's economy as a whole, according to a recent study by Clean Energy Canada.

Still, even if curbing our climate emergency is unquestionably good for the economy, elected officials still struggle to come to terms with today's price tag, fearing reprisal at the polls.

But not all climate initiatives require generational spending. Some of the most effective government policies cost next to nothing.

Here are three.

1 Cleaning up the cars



They may not have the pizzazz of tidal power or wind farms, but low carbon fuel standards are relatively cheap to implement and they work.

A low carbon fuel standard (LCFS) sets a benchmark for the greenhouse gas intensity of vehicle fuels, and compels fuel suppliers to reach it – by either cleaning up their act, or by buying credits from low carbon fuel suppliers.

The goal: encourage the growth of sustainable fuel producers, force changes from carbon-intense fuel producers, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions along the way.

In British Columbia, the LCFS is credited with 25 per cent of BC's emission reductions between 2007 and 2012. In California, an LCFS has helped drive growth in the renewable energy sector, and a report from Consumers Union (a division of Consumer Reports) suggests it will pay off for taxpayers: clean transportation policies could end up saving California households up to \$1,530 each year by 2030.

2 Building better



Energy efficiency programs don't grab headlines. But their price tag is modest, and their potential is transformative.

According to the International Energy Association, an estimated 49 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions reductions needed to stay below two degrees are going to come from energy efficiency – more, even, than renewable energy.

If run equitably, efficiency programs also help create good jobs in communities, supporting people and economies where we live.

It's easy to see why building efficiency is a key pillar of the Green New Deal, which calls for an overhaul of every US building to "achieve maximal energy efficiency, water efficiency, safety, and durability." Efficiency has been central to Sweden's ambitious climate work – by 2020, the government there hopes to make buildings 20 per cent more efficient than they were in 2008.

Rebate programs are important, and many are available to Nova Scotians today – those programs see upfront costs for government in exchange for long-lasting benefits in energy efficiency. But a few simple policy shifts that cost governments even less can make a big impact; i.e. changing building codes and increasing efficiency standards.

The goal? Working towards the net zero energy home: a home that is so efficient, it uses only the energy it produces.

3 Plant a few (billion) trees



Getting a tree in the ground isn't just a well-worn symbol of hope and environmental stewardship - it's a cheap and effective way to start cooling the planet.

In a study published recently in the journal *Science*, scientists found that planting nearly a billion acres of forest has the potential to suck up a quarter of the atmospheric carbon pool. Planting trees, they argue, is among the most effective way to combat climate change.

And, it's relatively cheap.

The study puts Canada among the top six countries with the most room for new trees - which means Canadian governments could have a unique opportunity to help restore the world's canopy.

There is no shortage of low—or no—cost initiatives that governments can take to confront our climate crisis. All it takes is a little political will.

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