

Clean Energy Works for Montana

Montana Audubon MTPR October 5 Commentary

Clean energy and climate legislation is making its way through the US Congress just as the first commercial cargo ships in history are making their way through an ice-free arctic passage. Thanks to obstacles created by special interests in the fossil fuel industry the big freighters are having the easier trip.

On Sept 24, Montana Public Radio listeners heard Dave Galt, the Executive Director of Montana Petroleum Association, comment on the “cap and trade” legislation that passed the US House in June and has just been introduced in the Senate. The reasoning behind his commentary was simple and obvious: exaggerate the costs of this legislation while disregarding its benefits in order to frighten the public away and protect the short-term profits of the fossil fuel industry.

This is Amy Cilimborg of Montana Audubon with another look at what clean energy and the federal legislation that promotes it can do for our wildlife, our economy and our national security.

In Montana, conservation groups like Audubon are partnering with businesses, youth groups, faith leaders, and communities to move toward a fairer, more affordable energy system that protects the environment. This broad-based alliance recognizes that clean energy is the best way to preserve habitat, grow a sustainable economy and provide good jobs for Montanans. And we know that claims about excessive costs from climate legislation are merely industry propaganda.

The legislation in front of Congress today does more than put a price on carbon – it promotes energy efficiency and home-grown renewable energy, including emerging green industries which are poised for growth in Montana.

Montana's solar resources could produce more than three times the state's current power production and our wind resources could produce three times *that*. With so much wind we can site projects carefully to protect wildlife and benefit those who need it most. Wind generating projects on agricultural land are a perfect fit for Montana – providing stable farm income while preserving sensitive lands and limiting the bird mortality that some early wind farms were notorious for.

But polluting fossil fuels still dominate our energy supply, largely because the playing field is not level. A study by the [Environmental Law Institute](#) reveals that in recent years fossil fuels have received six times more in government subsidies than wind, geothermal, and solar power.

Jobs in renewable energy, as well as jobs retrofitting homes, schools, and businesses to be more energy efficient, cannot be outsourced. In fact, [studies](#) show that clean energy investments generate three times more jobs than the equivalent amount of investment in fossil fuels.

Especially important to Montanans, the legislation under consideration includes funding to protect wildlife and natural resources from climate change. Up to five percent of the money raised by putting a price on carbon could be used to understand and mitigate the effects climate change has on wildlife and natural systems, thanks to the efforts of Senator Baucus.

You need only look at the acres of red trees, increasing wildfire risks, shrinking glaciers, ecological disruptions, decreased snowpack, and projected increase in droughts that affect everyone from farmers to fish to know that that Montana will pay a disproportionate share of global warming's costs.

Greenhouse gas emissions are skyrocketing because their hidden costs are not factored into business decisions -- factories and power plants don't pay for the pollution they cause. Putting a dollar value on carbon emissions fixes that failure and provides the incentive to pollute less.

MPA's Dave Galt – using inflated cost estimates that even the [study's original author](#) has asked be retracted – throws out the exorbitant figure of over \$3000 per family per year in increased energy costs in hopes of frightening people away from climate legislation. But credible estimates by the non-partisan [Congressional Budget Office](#) put the figure at about \$160, or 44 cents/day. And this small investment in our future will pay dividends in decreased costs for firefighting and drought relief, as well as save military spending and human lives lost securing overseas oil supplies.

The fossil fuel industry's arguments are the same we heard eighteen years ago when Congress took on acid rain with the Clean Air Act. They said millions of jobs would be lost and energy bills would rise astronomically. But no jobs were lost, energy bills fell instead, and the environmental and health benefits have improved quality of life and almost certainly lowered the taxes needed to support environmental clean-up. That's right, wise investment in a healthy economy and environment can lower taxes.

It's time to get off the fossil fuel roller coaster and adopt solutions that protect consumers, farmers, our wildlife and our children's future. We can do it for the cost of a postage stamp a day and we can do it this year. We don't need scare tactics, we need solutions; which were notably absent from the Petroleum Association's commentary.

In that commentary, Mr. Galt said "There's the old saying that if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it's a duck." Like most Montanans, we Auduboners know our ducks. We know they need healthy environments like the prairie potholes of eastern Montana that are drying up in our warming world. And they need sportsmen, birdwatchers and other informed citizens who understand that an energy supply that benefits wildlife also benefits us.

This is Amy Cilimburg with Montana Audubon – visit us at mtaudubon.org where you can learn more about global warming impacts and how to be part of the solution. Thanks for listening.