

## PRINCIPLES *for* FEDERAL POLICY *on* CLIMATE CHANGE

The following principles are provided by the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI), which represents more than 100 evangelical leaders – including college presidents, mega-church pastors, international aid executives, and denominational heads. Because of their commitment to Jesus Christ, these leaders are compelled to seek ways to help our country solve the global warming problem.

As spelled out more fully in the ECI statement, *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action* (see [www.christiansandclimate.org](http://www.christiansandclimate.org)), ECI leaders believe that love of God, love of neighbor, and the demands of stewardship are more than enough reason for us to respond with moral passion and concrete action. The values and principles found in the Bible—such as prudence, care for the poor, and stewardship of God’s provision—compel us to seek sound and just policies in keeping with classic Christian thought. As such, ECI leaders contend that the following principles should guide government officials as they establish policies at the federal level to begin to solve global warming.

### 1. The Problem is Real, the Objective Clear

We believe that human-induced global warming is real and, based on nearly universal agreement in the scientific community, we encourage policy-makers to accept this fact and to take action to slow, stop, and reverse the trend of increasing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Discussions in the policy arena should now concentrate on solutions.

We agree with the objective of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), a treaty that President George H. W. Bush signed and that was ratified by the Senate. The FCCC’s objective is “to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a low enough level to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” The federal government should honor this treaty.

Based on the findings of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world’s most authoritative body on the subject, in the U.S. reductions from the year 2000 levels on the order of 80 percent by 2050 will be necessary to prevent such dangerous human-induced interference with the climate system.

### 2. Maximize Freedom in Solving the Problem

We believe human beings are free moral agents whom God enables to choose to do what is right; they should be free to live the lives He intends for them. Thus, governments should expand and protect freedom to allow individuals to do His will. Freedom flourishes when the rule of law prevents chaos. In the case of global warming, a proper policy framework will establish the “rules of the road” and what businesses call “regulatory certainty.” This can enhance freedom by allowing us to begin to solve a problem whose impacts will severely limit that freedom in the future if not addressed.

To protect freedom, unnecessary government regulations must be avoided. Government policies should be structured to allow the free market to solve the problem to the greatest extent possible. We should use the least amount of government power necessary to achieve the objective.

### 3. Maximize Protection from Harm from Generation to Generation

A primary function of government is to protect all of its citizens from undue harm, be it from foreign invaders, criminals, or pollution that impacts human health. Such protection helps to create the conditions for citizens, families, and communities to flourish. The harm from global warming is likely to be widespread, diverse, and deadly -- heat waves, floods, droughts, intensification of hurricanes, the spread of infectious diseases, and refugee crises. The impact will be worse for our children, our grandchildren, and their children if we fail to act today. Strong and decisive government leadership is required now to address this threat and to promote life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and a policy that will be truly family-friendly for generations to come.

### 4. Take Special Care to Protect the Most Vulnerable

Jesus calls His followers to protect the poor, and as citizens in a democracy we want our government to do the same. The most important way that federal government policy can protect the poor here and around the world from the impacts of global warming is to begin to solve the problem by reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions 80 percent by 2050.

In addition, we recommend the following policies to protect the poor from both the impacts of climate change as well as any possible adverse impacts from climate legislation itself:

- consumer protection/assistance (e.g. LIHEAP) and weatherization assistance for low-income families;
- transition assistance for dislocated workers and communities;
- adaptation and mitigation assistance to least-developed countries, and;
- research into adaptation and mitigation measures for low-income households in the U.S. and the poor in least-developed countries.

With all of these policies, we favor an approach whereby faith communities can work in partnership with governments to deliver such services and assistance.

## **5. Enhance National and Energy Security, International Religious Freedom, and Rural Economic Development**

The massive impacts of climate change around the world will have serious national security implications, creating a less-stable world. American reliance on foreign oil also undermines our national security, and makes us dependent on undemocratic, despotic foreign regimes that restrict the religious liberty of their peoples, threaten the stability of democratic allies such as Israel, and constrain our ability to occupy the moral high ground in foreign policy on human rights and religious freedom. Thus, we are in favor of climate policies that reduce our dependence on foreign oil (e.g. increasing fuel economy) and thereby enhance energy security and our advocacy of religious liberty and human rights.

In addition, a robust climate policy that increases our use of renewable sources like solar, wind, and biofuels will be a lifeline for struggling rural economies and will stabilize the economic outlook for family farms.

## **6. Disburse Decision-making Authority to the Lowest Possible Level**

We believe that in general the flourishing of freedom occurs when the power to make decisions resides at the lowest possible organizational level. A robust response to the threat of global warming will involve individuals, families, churches, businesses, and governments at multiple levels. In particular, we believe in states' rights and responsibilities as the laboratories of democracy. Strong action on climate by states, businesses, families, and individuals should be encouraged and not weakened by action at the federal level.

Given that the problem is global, and that nation-states are primary seats of government authority, important decisions must be made at the national level and between nations at the international level. While state actions and voluntary initiatives have resulted in positive benefits in the U.S., national emissions have continued to rise at a level inconsistent with long-term climate protection. In addition, businesses are now facing an inefficient patchwork of regulations. Thus, an economy-wide federal policy with mandatory targets and timetables for major sources of emissions is needed to achieve an 80 percent reduction by 2050. However, this policy should allow for maximum freedom for businesses and the states.

## **7. Solve the Problem through the Free Market and Protection of Property Rights**

Harnessing the power of the market will allow innovation, ingenuity, and entrepreneurship to generate climate solutions, and will ensure that U.S. businesses can compete internationally in clean technologies. To help ensure competitiveness, climate policy should provide: (1) a stable, long-term, substantial research and development program; (2) long-term regulatory certainty, and; (3) a robust price signal that reflects the true

social cost of greenhouse gas pollution.

We feel it is important to recognize that global warming pollution invades the property rights of all its victims, and restricts their freedom by forcing them to bear costs they should not have to pay because of the actions of others—in either the quality of the air they breathe, the geography they hold dear, the insurance costs they bear, or the future environment of the children they love. Climate policy should ensure that the costs of global warming pollution are reflected in the price of goods and services that produce greenhouse gases. When prices are right, the free market can do its job.

We believe that the preferable market-based mechanisms will be the ones that are politically achievable in the near term. The U.S. now has extensive experience in managing a successful cap-and-trade program for sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), and there is growing political support for a cap-and-trade system. This could also allow us access to a global trading system, providing further efficiencies. We support a cap-and-trade approach, by itself or in combination with a revenue-neutral global warming pollution tax whereby those who act to reduce global warming pollution receive a tax cut.

## **8. Start Now and Solve the Problem in the Most Cost-Effective, Least-Disruptive Way Possible**

Significant reductions in global warming pollution should start sooner rather than later in order to minimize disruption to the economy, and to avoid the necessity of drastic, steep reductions in the future. Shifting swiftly to a course that includes emissions reductions will minimize economic damage from climate change and will create a smooth transition to a new energy future.

## **9. Lead by Example**

Regardless of whether all nations agree to be part of the solution, America must do the right thing. America is committed to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law regardless of the actions of other nations, and the same must be true of our response to global warming. We do not have to wait for China and India to act before we do. We have contributed by far the most CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere. We should lead by example and create the technologies everyone will need to help solve the problem.

## **10. Learn from the Future**

Our understanding will continue to grow, and we may find that we must accelerate steps that address climate change. Climate policies must be flexible to account for what we will learn in the future. In addition, we must avoid making decisions now that constrain our ability to control greenhouse gas emissions in the future. Specifically, we must encourage innovation and prevent energy infrastructure developments that lock us into old, inefficient technologies for years to come.

# THE EVANGELICAL CLIMATE INITIATIVE