

Think Local, Act Global!

State and City Climate Leadership Includes Global Finance

Peter Fox-Penner¹ and Benito Müller²

8 February 2017

By slashing Federal funding to combat climate change, President Trump has declared war – not on climate change, but on our ability to deal with it! Climate change is an existential global problem that cannot be solved by building walls. As Washington is abrogating its leadership both at home and abroad, states and cities must step up on both. Globally, the poorest and most vulnerable allies must be supported to enable them to combat climate change on top of reducing poverty.

Well before the November 2016 elections, U.S. cities and states were playing a leading role in reducing carbon pollution and the superstorms and droughts that are caused by climate change. After an initial flurry of actions in which President Trump has disrupted and threatened America's international reputation in many areas, it is now clear that cities and states must do more, not least in counterbalancing the expected loss of Federal funding pledged by the Obama administration to help developing countries.

Individual U.S. states have already taken the lead in introducing economic instruments to reduce the cost of their own emission reductions. New York and California are both part of regional emission trading schemes, while Oregon, Massachusetts and Wyoming are considering the introduction of a carbon tax. Such leadership in domestic action is essential. But if cities and states are to truly substitute for national leadership, they must begin to think beyond borders. The climate crisis can only be solved through united worldwide efforts. And for many of the poorest and most vulnerable nations in the world, an essential part of the solution is gaining access to the funding required to cope with the disastrous floods, famines, and economic losses caused by climate change. All of this takes the carefully directed funding of projects in the least developed world.

It is understandable that a state or city may feel that it is more than doing its part by spending both public and private funds on plans to cut its own future emissions dramatically. Providing funds to someone halfway across the globe – to build a renewable grid, or a flood-resilient agricultural system – may seem like a role that cities or states are simply not ready to assume. In America, as the saying goes, 'all politics is local'.

But different times and different challenges call for different thinking. The new leaders of American climate action – governors, mayors, and their citizens – must recognize that the (admittedly heroic) feat of cutting their own emissions can no longer be seen as solving this global problem. Helping the least-developed countries to reduce their own emissions and protect themselves from the adverse impacts of climate change is now regarded as an essential part of the solution. Without funding from the wealthier

¹ Prof. Fox Penner is Director of Boston University's Institute for Sustainable Energy; pfoxp@bu.edu, (202) 256-4577.

² Prof. Müller is Convener, International Climate Policy Research at the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, UK; benito.muller@philosophy.ox.ac.uk, +44 7876 566975.

parts of the world – including U.S. cities and states – this simply will not happen. The climate crisis will not be solved, and the rising seas and storms will attack America's coastline, even if American cities themselves emit almost no greenhouse gases.

The good news is that the means to solve the problem are easily within reach. As cities and states adopt trading markets for carbon emissions, renewable energy certificates, and many other clean energy financing mechanisms, they could easily dedicate a small (say 2 percent) share of these revenues to international efforts. The province of Quebec has already pledged \$5 million to the UN Least Developed Country Fund. Mechanisms to fund contributions such as this must become an essential part of state and local climate policies. It has been said that: [If the Paris Conference made it 'chic' for sub-nationals to provide multilateral support for climate change finance, now it must become 'de rigueur'!](#) With the new administration being intent on crippling multilateralism in general ([Trump Prepares Orders Aiming at Global Funding and Treaties](#)) and funding for international climate funds in particular, it is key that the leadership of states in the Trump era also extends to contributing to these now depleted international channels for funding the poorest and most vulnerable countries struggling with climate change on top of poverty reduction.

Finally, neither citizens nor leaders should view this as 'merely' an ethical problem. It is simply part of the solution. As the U.S. found with the post-World War II Marshall Plan, international funding will pay long-term economic and security dividends. In addition to the real ethical dimensions of assisting those in need, healthy and resilient emerging economies will be better and safer allies and trading partners. They are the growth markets for the clean energy technologies U.S. cities and states will produce for the rest of the century. When solving multi-faceted problems of epic proportions, sometimes it is necessary to 'think local but act global'.