

Realities, Demographics And Policy All Point To Pricing Carbon Dioxide

Bob Inglis Contributor 

I direct [republicEn.org](https://republicen.org), conservatives who care about climate change.



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Senator Kevin Cramer (R-ND) is the co-sponsor of the PROVE IT Act, a bipartisan bill introduced in ... [+] CQ-ROLL CALL, INC VIA GETTY IMAGES

Campaigning right of center for climate action in America is like campaigning for Congress in a challenge race. You know that you've got a shot, you've always got a shot, but you need things to happen that are beyond your control.

Successful challengers in Congressional races point their boards at the beach, choose a rideable wave and paddle their hearts out, all the while knowing that it's the wave that's going to get them to the beach. Unsuccessful challengers fail because they're deluded into thinking that it's their good looks and articulate ability that are going to get them up on the beach.

Three waves are forming to take the climate effort to success: a reality wave, a demographic wave and a policy wave.

Reality. Climate change is happening, and we're all experiencing it. In the 1990s you had to have a scientific mind to see it. Now all you need is some situational awareness. Yes, there are the Merchants of Doubt (well described in a [book](#) and a [film](#) by that name) who furiously kick up dust to try to obstruct our vision, but the dust keeps clearing. The

science in the modeling is quite complex, but we can all get the simple chemistry (that burning fossil fuels increases CO₂ in the atmosphere) and the well-known physics (that additional heat gets trapped because of the presence of more greenhouse gases in the atmosphere). Even though the modeling is complex and subject to legitimate scientific discussion, the realities of the chemistry and the physics are hitting us. The water is coming up, temperatures are up, droughts are drying up previously fertile lands, and storms are hitting with greater intensity and frequency.

Demographics. Polling demonstrates young conservatives want action on climate change as much as young progressives do. These young people plan on living on the planet for a while, and they want their political party to be relevant to their future. [81% of Republicans aged 18 to 44](#) say that climate change is either “a severe threat now” or “may be worse in the years ahead.”

It’s these demographics that are causing longer-time horizon Republicans—who hope to win in successive election cycles—to engage on climate. Part of that will to engage is evidenced by the [Conservative Climate Caucus](#) chaired U.S. Rep. John Curtis (R-UT3) now boasting 81 members. These longer-time-horizon Republicans are the truer future of the GOP because they have staying power.

Policy. The European Union’s carbon tariff is a policy wave with a lot of power in it. Commencing this past October 2023, importers to Europe now must document their carbon emissions. [Starting in 2026](#), those importers will have to buy European Union carbon credits to cover their emissions.

This carbon tariff is going to make light bulbs come on in the U.S. Capitol. “You mean that we could have collected that carbon tax ourselves—and that with no impact on our companies because they’re going to have to pay it anyway?” And then the klieg lights might just come on, “Wow, and we could do that to imports from China and elsewhere?” That’s when America may discover that we can get the whole world “in” on climate action by conditioning access to the American market on the payment of a tipping fee for dumping into the trash dump of the sky.

Already, the U.S. Congress is taking note of the power in this EU policy wave headed to our shores:

- The [PROVE IT Act](#) has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Cramer (R-ND) and Coons (D-DE) and a companion is expected to be introduced soon in the House. The bill would document emissions associated with key products.
- Sen. Cassidy (R-LA) has introduced the [Foreign Pollution Fee Act](#) which would impose an American carbon tariff on key products coming from countries with greater carbon intensity than our goods.

The authors of the PROVE IT Act and the Foreign Pollution Fee Act are at pains to say that the bills are not precursors to a domestic carbon tax or to a carbon border adjustment. But all of those things are nicely facilitated by the data that will be gathered pursuant to the PROVE IT Act, and the Foreign Pollution Fee Act is clearly a carbon tariff.

Because the climate conversation has mostly been conducted in the language of the Left, the merchants of doubt try to throw even right-of-center climate campaigners into the ‘woke’ basket. The best way to break out of that basket is to present the conservative case for action in the language of conservatism and to go on the ground in targeted districts/states. It’s rock-solid conservatism to talk about internalizing negative externalities, and carbon border adjustment mechanisms can answer the legitimate question of fellow conservatives: how do you get the world “in” on solving climate change.

Early in congressional challenge races, only a few people join you in believing that it will work. There’s not much money available, and all you’ve got is shoe leather. But if the message is true to the times and if the wave breaks with you atop your board, it’s a thrilling ride. That’s where we are on climate. The impossible is going to become inevitable without ever passing through the probable.

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Bob Inglis

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I’m a Republican who served in the U.S. Congress for twelve years. I represented Greenville-Spartanburg, SC from 1993-1999 and again from 2005-11. Before... **Read More**

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