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Margaret Chase Smith Library 2023 Essay Contest

Each year the Margaret Chase Smith Library sponsors an essay contest for high school seniors. The essay prompt for 2023 asked students to consider what the proper role of government should be in responding to the issues surrounding climate change. Essays have been edited for length.

SECOND-PLACE ESSAY

Integration, Regulation, and Collaboration: Three Steps to Combat Climate Change

by Victoria Leavitt

“Now or never.” This is what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2022) has warned. The IPCC warns that the world is on a fast track to disaster if we do not act now and urges governments to increase actions to control carbon emissions. But what is the proper course of action for a government to take? How involved should they get? After all, the government is responsible for protecting its citizens’ health and well-being. The proper role of the government in facing the issues surrounding climate change is to implement and enforce climate actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change. There are three essential steps that the government must complete to achieve these aims: integration, regulation, and collaboration.

INTEGRATION

Climate change must not be treated as a separate issue but as an integral part of all policies and decisions. This means that the US government must integrate climate change considerations into all aspects of policy making and planning, including economic policies,

energy policies, land use planning, and transportation. One example of an initiative currently being implemented nationwide is the adoption of electric school buses. In 2022, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) spearheaded the Clean School Bus Program, which uses funding from the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to offer rebates for schools to replace existing school buses with electric, zero-emission buses. With this initiative, even if only “half of all school buses in the country switched from diesel to electric, about 2.1 million tons of carbon dioxide could be reduced annually.”¹ By integrating climate change considerations into all policies and planning, the government can address climate change comprehensively and effectively.

REGULATION

The government must regulate industries and businesses to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. There are various means by which the government can accomplish this, including setting emissions standards, implementing carbon pricing mechanisms, and providing incentives for adopting clean

technologies. By regulating emissions, the US government can create a level playing field for businesses and industries, create incentives for innovation and investment in clean technologies, and ensure everyone does their part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. One foreign country policy the United States should use as an example is Canada’s carbon tax. In 2018, Canada’s federal parliament passed the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act (GGPPA), which imposed minimum prices on carbon emissions for all consumers across the country. The initial tax in 2019 was \$20 Canadian per ton, which has since increased to \$65 Canadian per ton at the start of this year. Intending to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, the Canadian government plans to increase the tax by \$15 Canadian per ton yearly, starting this year and stopping in 2030 once the tax is \$170 Canadian per ton (Austen 2021). This carbon tax applies to all consumers—citizens and companies alike—and is integrated smoothly through increased prices at the gas pump and home utility bills. The tax holds big polluters in various industries accountable for their emissions and incentivizes everyday consumers to switch to cleaner, energy-efficient options, like electric vehicles. Additionally, the Canadian government established a Climate Action Incentive rebate program, which returns the climate tax revenue to eligible taxpayers.² Implementing carbon taxes and incentives such as this is an effective way for the government to regulate carbon emissions in the United States.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is an essential step toward combating climate change. As

a global issue, foreign governments, organizations, and stakeholders must cooperate to make a significant impact. The US government must actively work with other countries to develop and implement international agreements and policies that tackle climate change. Together, foreign governments can develop international agreements such as the Paris agreement, which set out a framework for global action to limit global warming to no more than 2 degrees Celsius.

Additionally, countries that are more affluent can bring energy-efficient technologies to less wealthy areas with extensive collaboration, making climate initiatives more widespread and influential. Finally, foreign governments can use their influence to unite with national and international organizations, companies, and individuals to raise awareness about the urgent need for climate action. With international collaboration, achieving meaningful progress in reducing climate impacts would be easier; therefore, the United States government must prioritize it.

As has been shown, the proper role of the government in facing the issues surrounding climate change is to implement and enforce policies and regulations that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Integrating, regulating, and collaborating is a practical method for the government to succeed in this role. By integrating climate change considerations into all policies and planning, regulating emissions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and collaborating with others to address climate change, the government can help to ensure a sustainable future for all. If we act now, we could lessen the detrimental impacts that our carbon emissions have on the planet; there does not have to be a “never” for future generations.

NOTES

- 1 <https://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus>; <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/what-if-electric-school-buses-could-be-used-supply-power-when-duty>
- 2 <https://www.canadadrives.ca/blog/news/carbon-taxes-and-carbon-tax-rebates-in-canada-explained>

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Victoria Leavitt is a 2023 Windham High School graduate from Windham, Maine. In high school, she was the president of the Latin Honors Society; a dedicated

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