

Social Policy Advocacy from a Presbyterian Earth Care Perspective

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Advocacy informed by faith approaches social policy from a perspective that includes theological vision and spiritual-ethical dispositions. Theologically, we trust in the One who creates, redeems, and sustains all of life. Spiritually, our lives are a continual response of gratitude and thanksgiving for the many gifts of life that we have been given by the creation, by our heritage and traditions, and by our families and friends.

Out of that gratitude arises a basic sense of compassion that disposes us to respond actively and hopefully to the tragedies and injustices of our world. If the emotional aspect of compassion disposes us to reach out with helping hands and hearts, the cognitive aspect of compassion is to expand our caring beyond the normal boundaries of tribe and nation to our common humanity and our being creatures of the earth. This is to say, we begin to commit ourselves to solidarity with all creatures, taking responsibility as faithful stewards of God's creation. Along with solidarity there are two other ethical norms that guide us in our stewardship. These are: sufficiency for all, and the sustainability of the earth, our home, for future generations of all the children of all the species of our planet.

However, there is a new tension between the norms of sufficiency for all and the sustainability of the creation. The developed world chose global capitalism as the way to develop sufficiency for all the nations of the world. We now know that this particular economic model endangers our planet, and the sustainability of all species. This moment in history calls for solidarity with all future generations of all creation's children as well as a solidarity that protects the most vulnerable as it provides a new kind of social, economic, and environmental sufficiency. This new sufficiency must reflect the justice that biblical people know is at the heart of our faith.

Given the climate and energy concerns before us, our faith-based advocacy can take place under the following three focal points:

EARTH CARE AS SOCIAL JUSTICE: Sufficiency for the Most Vulnerable.

Focal Points:

1. The developed world must help poor nations without the resources that enable resilience in response to natural disasters. (e.g. Haiti)
2. Food security should be related to the principles of Fair Trade policies and institutions.

Policy Advocacy:

1. The United States should strive to provide about 30 billion dollars annually for adaptation for countries most vulnerable to climate change as our part in an annual budget of approximately 100 Billion dollars. This \$30 billion will require about 6%-7% of the value of carbon permits auctioned by the government.

2. Adaptation funds should provide for the development of an international emergency disaster response team that spearheads and coordinates aid provided by all nations as one aspect of adaptation planning.

EARTH CARE AS ECONOMIC JUSTICE: Sufficiency for the American People

Focal Points:

1. Controlling climate change and earth warming depends on raising the price of carbon-based energies. These costs to citizens and small businesses should be offset by various policy tools.
2. The growth of green industry including a strong manufacturing component is vital to the economic justice of the American working class, and is a major factor in converting to a sustainable economy.
3. Geographical regions in our nation (e.g. Appalachia) will need special assistance in diversifying their local economy in the direction away from fossil fuel mining and toward renewable energy production.

Policy Advocacy:

1. All carbon permits under any Cap and Trade legislation should be auctioned, with a significant part of these revenues returned to citizens in an equitable manner to offset energy price increases (Note: the Cantwell CLEAN bill proposal would rebate 75% of all permit value to citizens)
2. A strong target for the development of renewable energy should beset to establish industrial certainty and promote investment in renewable energy. A 25% Renewable Energy Standard (RES) by 2025 is a good target.
3. Maria Cantell, D-Washington proposes in her CLEAN bill that 25% of the revenues from the sale of permits under a Cap and Trade bill would be used to set up a "Clean Energy Re-Investment Fund." The fund is used to provide targeted relief to particular regions for adaptation and transitioning to a more diversified renewable energy economy.

EARTH CARE AS ENVIRONMENTAL AND GENERATIONAL JUSTICE:

Solidarity with future generations through a sustainable economics that serves the commons.

Focal Points:

1. Solidarity with future generations is shown by the urgency of response to the global energy and climate change crisis.

2. The Public is the Owner and the Government the steward of the Commons. Polluters must pay for their pollution of the environment.

3. The metrics of the well being of our species and all species replaces the metric of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of how well we are doing. We seek a well being that finds a just balance between sufficiency for all and sustainability, and therefore, between social justice, economic justice and earth-justice.

Policy Advocacy:

1. We must pass legislation that doubles the present proposed rate of emissions decline (17% in House bill, 20% in Senate) by 2020 from a 2005 base to the range of 40-45% by 2020. This signals the urgency of our effort to keep carbon emissions as close to 350 ppm as possible.

2. There should be a 100% auction of all carbon permits.

3. Carbon “offsets” should be reduced or eliminated as in the Cantwell bill, and replaced with other policy mechanisms used to encourage land practices that provide carbon sinks.

4. A metrics of well being should be developed to supersede GDP as a measure of economic growth and well being.

John Preston is the northeast representative to the PEC steering committee and co-editor with Andrew Bartlett of the Global Eco(n) Justice newsletter published by the Hunger agency in collaboration with PEC. He is the author of Wrestling Until the Dawn: The Fight for Biblical Justice in a Postmodern World. He is on the Advocacy committee of PEC as well as the Advocacy Working Group of a Presbytery Partnership Group in the Synod of the Northeast. He has been following the various energy and climate change bills recently offered in the house and senate. He resides with his wife, Sally in upstate New York.