

Weiss: Trees are not the answer for long-term carbon reduction

I love it when people, such as Tom Clarke, think outside the box to solve problems ("Environmentalists bet on coal-mining venture," Aug. 18 news story). I applaud Clarke's efforts to keep miners employed, keep the lights on and lower coal's emissions. However, his proposal raises questions.

Clarke expects that a 10 percent electricity price increase will recoup 30 percent of emissions from coal-powered electricity. How will the other 70 percent be recouped? Or does he expect every year a gradually increasing percentage of credits — so that after a few years, 100 percent of coal emissions will be reclaimed with a 33 percent total price rise?

Clarke, an environmentalist, must know there are differences between "new carbon" and "old carbon." When he says "The tree is the answer," he knows that trees don't remove atmospheric carbon permanently, in the way deeply buried fossils were removed to become "old carbon." How does he deal with this long-term issue?

How will rising temperatures — already killing forests with beetles, droughts and fires — impact his trees' capacity to store carbon even in the short term?

Other creative people, like Mark Jacobson (Stanford University), are thinking about cutting emissions while creating new, long-term jobs. Jacobson designed plans for each state to generate all its energy without emissions by 2050. For Virginia, Jacobson expects 30 percent of energy will come from solar, 40 percent from offshore wind and 20 percent from onshore wind. Jacobson estimates that by eliminating emissions, Virginia will create roughly 150,000 new, long-term jobs. How does Clarke's proposal help Virginia move in that direction, and how many local jobs will he create?

Clarke is basically proposing a voluntary 10 percent tax on coal's carbon. Why should coal users pay a carbon tax, but not utilities and industries that use oil and gas?

Clarke admits his proposal involves "a complex validation

process." Citizens' Climate Lobby proposes a simple carbon fee easily applied economy-wide and nationwide. CCL's proposal doesn't involve trees, it uses our free market.

I urge Clarke and other interested readers to please contact CCL for more information.

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