

We can do better

What a great op-ed by Paul Andersen (“Eco warriors on the home front,” The Aspen Times, Commentary, Dec. 5) asking us each to control our own carbon emissions. Andersen acknowledged that our Republican-controlled Congress’ agenda tends to restrict federal authority, and therefore he calls on each of us to cut our emissions without being dependent on centralized oversight. As far as Andersen went, it was a very clever column, detailing many valuable ways to cut our carbon emissions.

However, that’s not the whole story. For the average American household, 64 percent of our carbon footprint comes from embedded emissions — emissions arising during the manufacturing of products we buy. If we follow Andersen’s advice, the best we could do — aside from going completely off grid — is reduce our emissions by 36 percent. But we could do better. If we start a trend of reducing our purchases of new manufactured things, we could cut our carbon footprints by another 64 percent. It’s easy and inexpensive not to shop. What if we need a gift? Buy something gently used, give theater tickets or music festival tickets. But don’t buy new goods.

Imagine if Americans stop buying stuff (unless it’s from a local manufacturer who uses only certified green energy so there’s no embedded emissions) — our business sector and economic analysts would be very unhappy. If consumers refuse to buy new products with embedded carbon emissions, it would slow down their sales inventory. And modern businesses — your toy store, hardware store, home goods store — they can’t clean up the energy used by their suppliers and manufacturers. This is a huge problem requiring a powerful central authority to act.

In order for small businesses and individual consumers to have a choice about eliminating embedded emissions from our carbon footprint, we need a central authority like Congress setting effective policy to clean up the whole country’s energy and the whole world’s energy.

Congress can and must enact emissions legislation and impose it on imports with embedded emissions — or the public should turn off our buying power.

Our buying power is immense, and can even move a Republican Congress to take action with worldwide effects.

Contact Citizens’ Climate Lobby for more information about embedded emissions.

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