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Overcoming political barriers to environmental reforms

TerraWatts, TerraGrams, TerraLiters Workshop, 1 February 2016
Conversation I

• We don’t have the right technology...
• ...because we don’t have the right price...
• ...because we don’t have the political will to get the price right
Conversation II

• We don’t have the right price…
• …because climate change/environmental problems/sustainability is a collective action problem
• …and we don’t have the right institutions
While the world burns...
Conversation III

- Political barriers to sustainability reforms are critical
- I have a great policy idea / a great technology…
- …but the political climate is not right yet
• We don’t have the right policies…
• …because there are not yet political incentives to enact them…
• …but there are incentives to enact other policies…
• …that can build support for future reforms
Design Principles

• **Policy durability**: Does a policy’s design contain a logic that increases the durability of the reform over time?

• **Policy expansion over time**: Does a policy’s design contain a logic that will promote the ability of future policy advocates to expand climate policies, creating new policy advocates or increasing the relative resources available to existing policy advocates?
Clean Energy Act 2011

No. 131, 2011

An Act to encourage the use of clean energy, and for other purposes
ONE SIDE EFFECT OF AN ENERGY TAX.

Strangling the economy is too high a price to pay for a tax of dubious environmental value. Yet that is precisely what may happen if budget negotiators and Congress adopt an energy tax as part of a deficit reduction package. First, consider such side effects as unemployment, skyrocketing energy costs, and higher prices for U.S. products overseas.

Now consider that the measure is cruelly regressive, hitting hardest people who can least afford a hike in their utility bills. Those at the poverty line or below. Finally, take into account that utility customers already face a staggering $7 billion annual bill to clean the nation’s air.

By now, you’re probably getting the impression that we’re opposed to an energy tax.

Correct.

We urge budget negotiators and Congress not to put their energy into passing an energy tax.

The Environmental Tax Policy Alliance

1527 F Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005
Germany...

Black Forest, Germany
...but also Germany

Breisig Coal Mine, Germany
Designing Durable and Ambitious Climate Policy in the United States

December 2015

For more on the politics of policy design, White Paper from high-level Yale University workshop
Conclusions

• Getting the policy right is only half the challenge - also need to get the politics right.

• Build durability and expansion principles into policy design

• Advocacy strategies must be tailored to country / subnational contexts