

Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness

Portland Friends Meeting

“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people.” – George Fox 1656

As Quakers committed to our testimony of stewardship of the Earth, this can be a difficult and frustrating time. Many of our leaders do not share our concern about climate change, and concerted action to address the problem has been halting and sporadic. The new administration threatens to take us backwards, not forward.

In the face of these challenges, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee of Portland Friends Meeting will be launching a Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness. This program will encourage us to live out our values, to let our lives speak, both inwardly and outwardly.

Why Are We Doing This?

Most economists agree that putting a price on carbon would be the single most effective way to reduce emissions. In an ideal world, we would have implemented a carbon tax decades ago. But while such a tax is politically untenable in the foreseeable future, we can take the first steps ourselves. We can be the change we want to see in the world, we can live in the Light. By taxing ourselves and donating the funds to organizations leading the way on climate change, we will lead by example. We also hope that by drawing attention to our respective carbon footprints, we can collectively lower our impact on the planet. At a time when the politics of addressing climate change is largely stalled, we see the Witness as one way to make progress, and it is entirely in our hands. We don't have to persuade any elected official to agree with us. We don't have to protest or demonstrate for it. We simply have to walk the walk.

How Does It Work?

Whoever would like to participate will fill out a pledge form and send it to the Witness Steward (currently Rob Levin). Four times per year, participants in the Witness will make a contribution (i.e., a “tax payment”) to Portland Friends Meeting, based on their estimated carbon emissions. We'll encourage use of a Carbon Footprint Calculator to help with this estimation. The Meeting will distribute all of the funds contributed to the three organizations listed below.

How Will It Be Confidential?

The Witness will be voluntary and confidential. We will not be praising individuals who participate, nor shaming those who decline. The Meeting's Operating Account Treasurer (currently Kathy Beach) and the Witness Steward will be the only person with knowledge of who is participating, and they will keep this information confidential. Of course, individuals can always choose to share about their participation, but what will be shared and celebrated publicly is the number of people who participate and the amount of funds contributed.

What Organizations Will We Fund?

We have identified three organizations to receive an equal one-third share of the funds that we raise. These organizations represent a balance of the different strategies and actions that will

help us work towards a cooler planet. Many Quakers in Maine and elsewhere are directly involved in all three organizations.

- *Citizens Climate Lobby* – CCL builds constructive, working relationships with members of Congress to seek passage of Carbon Fee and Dividend, a climate change solution that bridges the partisan divide.
- *Maine 350* -- A grassroots movement dedicated to solving the planetary climate crisis. We grow our power collectively to find real and lasting solutions, to end our dependence on fossil fuels, and to build a healthy, sustainable life for people and the planet.
- *Climate Disobedience Center* – The purpose of the Climate Disobedience Center is to serve as a catalyst for direct action, creating points of vivid moral clarity, emboldening both climate activists and the unlikeliest of allies, capturing the heart and soul of the climate debate.

Who Else is Doing This?

The Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness first took off at Mount Toby Meeting in Massachusetts. As of January 2017, we know of 67 people in 9 groups who have made carbon tax pledges. The amount they have donated to climate stabilization activities and organizations is over \$27,000. For more info, visit www.voluntarycarbontax.org. We hope to dramatically expand those figures by our own participation at Portland Friends Meeting, as well as encouraging other religious and secular groups in Maine to adopt similar programs.

Is This All We Need to Do To Act on Climate Change?

No. Peace and Social Concerns views the Witness as one of many actions we need to take as individuals and as a Meeting to address climate change. We aim to take other climate-related measures throughout the coming months and years. Our committee registered a concern that participating in the Witness might lead us down the road of complacency, lest we feel that our conscience is eased because we are writing checks four times a year. We hope that the opposite effect occurs, and that being a part of the Witness inspires us to take other actions.

Who Can Participate?

We will launch the program in March at Portland Friends Meeting, with an initial focus on members and attenders. We plan to have materials available online, and individuals outside of the Meeting who wish to participate may do so. Eventually, after a few quarterly rounds of contributions are made and we work out any kinks, we will actively promote the program, encouraging other meetings and churches to participate, either by setting up their own programs or by joining our program.

Questions? Or to request a sign up form: Email Rob Levin, rob@roblevin.net