



## Get on Board

Tackling our number one planetary crisis demands both personal and political action. Now it's your turn to put the heat on Congress to enact an idea almost everyone can live with.

BY JERRY GOODBODY

*Illustrations by Laurent Cilluffo*

SINCE CONGRESS CHANGED HANDS last year, there have been dozens of hearings on ways to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)—the main greenhouse gas responsible for global warming—released into the atmosphere. Two strategies have emerged as favorites: a carbon tax and a cap-and-trade program.

Many experts believe that a carbon tax—one that might tax electric utilities for their emissions, a cost that would surely be passed down to their customers, or another that would raise the price of gasoline for drivers—would be the quickest, most effective means of reduc-

ing global warming. Just as higher prices for cigarettes have helped lower smoking rates, a carbon tax would likely spur people to use their cars less or drive more fuel-efficient models. Alas, higher taxes in this country are a political dead end.

But a nationwide cap-and-trade program, using the marketplace to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> pollution, is gaining considerable bipartisan support in Congress as well as from such industry heavyweights as General Motors and Duke Energy. They would prefer a national emissions standard to the patchwork quilt that will be created if individual states or groups of states take action themselves, which a number are considering. (For a basic explanation of how cap and trade works, see the following pages.)

A comparable marketplace system, established in 1990, is credited with slicing acid rain-causing sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) emissions almost in half—and at a much lower cost than originally estimated. Still, sources of carbon dioxide are more ubiquitous than those producing SO<sub>2</sub>, prompting some to question whether an effective market for greenhouse gases can really exist.

While cap and trade offers great promise, it's hardly a silver bullet. A more effective plan would take a “silver shotgun” approach that combines market-based regulatory instruments such as cap and trade with other policy tools—tougher efficiency standards for cars or appliances, for example.

In spite of the concerns, many are rallying behind cap and trade because there's no time to waste. “The United States needs to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions 80 percent by 2050, or about 2 percent a year,” says Betsy Loyless, Audubon's director of policy. “We are urging Congress to adopt that goal.”

---

**WHAT YOU CAN DO** Contact your members of Congress and demand they support meaningful cap-and-trade legislation. For updates on specific bills, go to [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) and subscribe to Audubon's E-Activist electronic newsletter.