

COMPASS: *Points of view from the community*

Slight sacrifices will reduce warming's whack at Alaska

By Sens. TED STEVENS
and LISA MURKOWSKI

Recently we agreed to co-sponsor the Low Carbon Economy Act, legislation that would, for the first time, regulate American carbon emissions. By placing a cost on carbon through a "cap and trade" program, this legislation would encourage energy conservation, foster technological innovation and dramatically reduce domestic carbon output.

Global temperatures have risen over the past three decades, and while the jury is still out on the cause, Alaskans are already feeling the effects. Our winters and summers have been 3 to 5 degrees warmer of late, and Arctic sea ice has shrunk by an area twice the size of Texas. Most glaciers are retreating, permafrost is warming and tundra lakes are evaporating. Forests have dried, triggering record wildfires. The oceans, becoming more acidic, threaten the vitality of our marine resources.

Whether climate change is caused by greenhouse gases, natural processes (such as solar radiation and ocean oscillation), or a combination of the two is likely to be debated for some time. For Alaskans, however, mitigating the consequences of global climate change will be as important as determining its



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Even as an insurance policy, it makes sense to take steps now to reduce carbon emissions. How big a policy do we need? Some argue that worldwide carbon emissions must be cut almost immediately by 85 percent. Given that the Earth's population has risen six-fold since the end of the last Little Ice Age, we know such a reduction simply isn't feasible, even if we were to ban all vehicle use tomorrow.

Out of economic necessity, the legislation we are co-sponsoring would first slow the growth of emis-

sions, and then reduce them. America would produce 15 percent fewer emissions by 2030, and nearly 60 percent fewer emissions by 2050. This approach should keep global temperatures beneath the level most scientists agree would cause serious environmental damage.

Passing the "cap and trade" bill sponsored by Sens. Bingaman and Specter would signal that we are serious about energy conservation, promoting renewable energy and limiting carbon emissions. It would also send a price signal to markets, power plant builders, home owners, car buyers, and a generation of American entrepreneurs ready to press ahead with technologies to capture and store carbon, power electric cars, build energy-efficient

appliances and perfect new designs for alternative energy. By paying a little more for electricity and gasoline, and a fraction more for natural gas starting next decade, we will encourage the birth of new industries and position American workers and technology at their vanguard.

Every policy, this one included, comes at a price. But according to the federal Energy Information Administration, America's GDP would be just three-tenths of a percent lower in 2030 as a result of this measure. Total energy prices would rise 12 percent that year compared to the status quo — far less than increases in the past couple of months alone.

Alaska's Institute for Social and Economic Research estimates the measure will cost a typical Anchorage household about \$173 more for energy in 2030. This is a significant

sum for Alaskans, who already pay the highest energy costs in the nation. But it pales in comparison to the potential costs of climate change. A recent ISER study pegs those at more than \$6 billion by 2030 — nearly \$9,000 per resident — just for government infrastructure in Alaska. When it comes to climate change, an ounce of prevention may be worth far more than a pound of cure.

As representatives of a state with tremendous natural resources, our decision to support policies to reduce carbon emissions may initially seem counterintuitive. Rest assured, the Low Carbon Economy Act is in the best interest of Alaska. We'll explain how in another commentary Thursday.

Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski represent Alaska in the U.S. Senate.

CONSIDER THIS

Today on the Web, the Daily News seeks your thoughts on what an editorial should say about the senators' global warming legislation. See the Inside Opinion blog for more information about this new interactive way of researching editorials, a feature we call "Consider This." Print-only readers can send their information or advice by e-mailing considerthis@adn.com.

