

The New York Times has an [editorial today](#) urging Congress to “build on [local and state] actions to fashion a national response to climate change.” That sentiment is welcome, but the Times still doesn’t quite get it. The editorial rightly lauds widespread state planning and emission reduction efforts, citing as particular examples renewable energy requirements, California’s new energy-efficiency rules for televisions, and New York City’s new mandate for energy audits on existing buildings. So far, so good. But it ends with a dull thud, simply urging that Congress “put[] a price on greenhouse gas emissions,” presumably through cap-and-trade legislation.

Yes, but not enough. The Times missed an opportunity to explain why national legislation must include more than cap-and-trade. All of the initiatives it praises are outside the realm of cap-and-trade. A carbon market would make renewables more economically attractive, but renewables mandates do more to promote the development and spread of promising new technologies. A carbon market alone won’t change consumer decisions about buying and using television sets; Americans are sufficiently attached to their TVs, and sufficiently unaware of the amount of power those TVs burn, that slightly higher electricity prices are unlikely to change viewing behavior. And a carbon price would do nothing to change the incentives builders have to save money by putting up energy-inefficient buildings, because the buyers, not the builders, pay the high energy costs.

So the Times had the headline and the beginning of the story right, but was off-target with the conclusion. Federal legislation should both set a carbon price and require the sorts of local planning and emission reduction efforts that leading states and cities are already undertaking.