

I'm a little late to the game here, but I've finally had a chance to read Harvard Prof. Skocpol's [post mortem](#) of why she thinks cap-and-trade legislation failed in the U.S. Congress in 2009-10, and what she thinks the best way forward in the future is. (Dan blogged about this already [here](#) and [here](#); Matt Kahn [here](#).)

For those of you who haven't read the 140-page pdf (available [here](#)), I encourage you to do so. It's well written and a good overview of the history of why Waxman-Markey failed (though as Skocpol herself notes, the best narrative is still [Eric Pooley's The Climate War](#)). The basic message of Skocpol can be boiled down as: (1) more leadership from President Obama probably wouldn't have made much of a difference; (2) increasing political polarization in DC meant that Republicans had become actively hostile to any additional environmental laws; and, (3) the environmental groups put too many eggs in the basket of an inside game, instead of trying to rally a grassroots movement to change the political dynamics in DC. Her proposal is that environmental activists focus on developing a clear, simple, and effective policy proposal that can be used to rally grassroots activists to mobilize and force legislation through in DC (she specifically endorses "cap-and-dividend" in which carbon permits would be auctioned off and the revenue distributed evenly to all Americans).

A lot of the leading voices in climate politics have responded, some [endorsing Skocpol's analysis](#), others [challenging various aspects](#). Overall, I do think that Skocpol has some good points, particularly the idea that a key element of any policy proposal is its political attractiveness – i.e., how well it can be used to mobilize the public to support it. These kinds of questions of framing, salience, simplicity, etc. are ones that I think legal and policy scholars and economists have ignored all too often in the debates over climate change.

But I do agree with [Dave Roberts](#) at Grist that Skocpol's proposed solution begs an important question: If Republicans are so hostile to environmental regulation, why should we expect a grassroots movement of a bunch of lefty environmentalists and Democrats to convince them to relent and allow passage of cap-and-dividend in Congress?

Here a lesson might be drawn from the debate over immigration reform: Republicans that once supported Governor Romney's campaign call for undocumented immigrants to "self-deport" have now embraced comprehensive immigration reform. Why? Because it's seen as in the party's political self-interest to do so in order to make inroads with the rapidly growing Hispanic voting population in the U.S. In particular, it appears to have become common wisdom within the GOP that a key reason for the party's loss in November was its dismal performance among Latino voters.

So the key is changing the underlying political landscape such that the Republican party sees it as essential to support some sort of carbon policy. (Relatedly, changing that landscape would also be useful to ensure greater unity within the Democratic party for carbon policy – one reason that cap-and-trade failed compared to health care is that Democratic senators from states such as West Virginia, Louisiana, and North Dakota are unlikely to support stringent carbon regulations.)

How might we accomplish this? Perhaps through lots of rallies and organizing as Skocpol proposes. But where will the resources for that organizing occur, over the long term? And might there be things that we could do that would increase the incentives of people to participate in those efforts? Or might there be things we could do to reduce the opposition to carbon policy? In my next post, I'll talk some about lessons we might draw from the campaign over Proposition 23 in California in 2010, where California voters soundly defeated efforts to repeal the state's greenhouse gas statute.