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Topics for General Audience

Saving the Planet Cost-Effectively: One-fifth of the world's carbon dioxide emissions are covered by a carbon pricing program. The range of advocates for a U.S. carbon tax span the political landscape, from economist Arthur Laffer to climate scientist Jim Hansen. As Washington DC delays taking action on climate change, a dozen states have priced carbon emissions through pollution markets. What does it mean to price carbon? What would it mean for our everyday lives? What would it mean for the environment? What are the political opportunities and barriers to moving forward with carbon pricing? Can carbon pricing deliver a Green New Deal, or is it a ploy to undermine ambitious efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions? This presentation will draw from the theory and practice of carbon pricing and pollution markets more generally to address these questions and explore the potential design of U.S. climate change policy.

50 Years of Cleaner Air: In 1970, people around the world celebrated Earth Day for the first time, a Republican president created the Environmental Protection Agency, and Congress passed the Clean Air Act. Since then, the U.S. economy has grown four-fold as lead in the air has declined 99%, ground-level smog has been reduced by one-third, and the ultra-fine particles that pose the gravest public health threat have fallen more than 40%. Innovation in policy, science, pollution-control technology, and the broader economy have contributed to the transformation of power generation, transportation, and manufacturing that have significantly enhanced the quality of life for Americans. The history of the Clean Air Act is also a story of coordination – and conflict – between Washington and the states, the emergence of “Baptists and Bootleggers” coalitions among environmentalists and polluters, and a tension between a law reflecting the politics and science of the 1970s and the challenges of the 21st century. This presentation will synthesize the environmental, economic, political, and legal lessons from the U.S. experience in promoting clean air and draw lessons for the future of environmental policy.

Managing Planet Earth: Despite numerous international conferences concluding with ambitious goals, urgent calls for cutting emissions by leading environmental activists, and the dramatic innovation in climate-friendly technologies, global emissions of greenhouse gases continue to rise. The prospect of a climate emergency – with global temperatures likely to warm more than 2 degrees Celsius above their

pre-industrial levels, driving more intense storms, heat waves, reduced agricultural output, sea-level rise, and other impacts – has driven activists to redouble their pleas for the world to reduce emissions. This presentation will examine the efforts and the challenges to negotiate international agreements to combat climate change. Given the historic focus on cutting emissions, the talk will explore a more comprehensive strategy for mitigating climate change risk. This will include ways to adapt to climate change, such as through investments in making infrastructure more resilient to climate-related risks, as well as ameliorating climate change through solar radiation management and other forms of so-called geo-engineering. The discussion will address the ethical, political, economic, environmental, and distributional consequences of alternative approaches for managing planet Earth.

Why Our Democracy Needs More Benefit-Cost Analysis: In our representative democracy, decision-making reflects the pressures of various interest groups, some of which may be at odds with what may be considered “the public interest.” The capture of government decision-makers by special interests can skew policy to the benefit of those interests. Institutionalizing efforts to shine light on decision-making – and to highlight the evidence informing decision-makers – can increase the costs of and potentially discourage such capture. This presentation will review the role of benefit-cost analysis in the decision-making of regulatory agencies since 1981 and demonstrate how it has informed the design of more effective regulations, motivated selection of regulatory options that make society better off, illustrated the distributional impacts of regulations, and countered regulatory capture. The talk will contrast this experience with the role of – or lack thereof – rigorous evidence on impacts, benefits, and costs of other policy approaches, such as through government spending and the tax code. The lessons drawn will examine how increasing the evidence base for decision-making can improve the performance of our democracy.

Topics for Classroom Sessions

(1) How Does Policy-Making Work in Practice? (One or more of the following in a given session)

- Insights from coordinating interagency process in the Federal government
- Engaging, shaping, and participating in international climate negotiations — lessons from bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral efforts
- Evaluating regulatory policy — using public comment and expert analysis to inform regulatory design and implementation
- Preparing to govern — lessons from the 2008-09 presidential transition

(2) Evaluating energy and environmental policy — how causal inference methods have improved our understanding of what works and what doesn't work in energy and environmental policy

(3) Topics that are a subset of the general audience topics described above