Climate Policymaking In The US On Local, State And Federal Level

In the last decade, the need for developing climate action strategy has become increasingly apparent for coastal regions. Rising sea levels and increasing temperatures threaten residents, ecosystems, infrastructure, and even tourism revenue. With nearly 195 miles of coastline, Boston appears extremely vulnerable to complications related to climate change. Policymakers at all levels are beginning to turn their attention on developing various strategies to mitigate and adapt to the new climate world. In this paper, I will explore these efforts made by policymakers at the local, state, and federal level, and which body has the most potential for establishing effective climate policy.FederalIn the recent past, federal climate policy enjoyed a relatively substantial kickstart during the Obama administration. In 2015, President Obama unveiled the Clean Power Plan, which aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 32% by 2030, setting the first national limits on power plant carbon emissions in the United States. EPA projections predicted that once carried out, the Clean Power plan would prevent 870 million tons of carbon pollution from entering the atmosphere, while saving the average family $85 on electricity bills. In addition to this ambitious carbon reduction plan, Obama signed the U.S. on to the Paris Climate Agreement, which aims to foster climate resiliency and prevent global temperatures from reaching 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Unfortunately, both the Clean Power Plan and the United States' commitment to the Paris Agreement have been halted by the Trump administration before they could truly make progress in achieving their respective goals. This kind of relatively easy, quick turnover for major environmental plans via changing administrations is a significant barrier for policies to be successful at the federal level. This impediment has been made quite apparent during the transition from the Obama years to the Trump administration. Despite the success in planning and creating policy, it is impossible to implement if the following administration decides to renege on previous commitments.LocalSince the 2016 election, many have turned to local governments to make headway

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Federal Level

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Local Level

Since the 2016 election, many have turned to local governments to make headway on establishing progressive climate policies. The city of Boston has made climate action a priority due to its proximity to the coast, high climate vulnerability, and a lack of action at the federal level. For example, in December of 2016, the city of Boston released Climate Ready Boston, an ongoing initiative to prepare Boston for the impacts of climate change. Within the report, Boston's goals are sorted into five layers: updating climate projections, prepare and connect communities, protect shores, build resilient infrastructure, and adapted buildings. Understandably, many of these initiatives are centered on thorough climate reporting, education, and adapting Boston's infrastructure to accommodate negative impacts due to climate change. In addition to this report, Mayor Marty Walsh recently unveiled "Resilient Boston Harbor", an extensive plan to transform the 47-miles of Boston shoreline by developing open green spaces and altering shore landscape in a manner that will better protect the city during major flooding events. Both Climate Ready Boston and Resilient Boston Harbor distinctly focus on adaptation strategies, which do not directly decrease the effects of climate change, but rather on the effect it will have on human beings. While it is imperative that large cities like Boston prepare for adaptations to be made, I believe this local level effort cannot make a large enough impact to mitigate the effects of climate change.

State Level

The state of Massachusetts is poised to be a climate leader in the New England region. Massachusetts has implemented a multitude of both mitigation and adaptation strategies in order to tackle climate change related impacts. Most notably, the state joined the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a market-based program that aims to cut power plant based carbon pollution in nine states in the Northeast region. RGGI functions as a cap and invest program that sets agreed upon regional limits on carbon emissions. Moreover, the program sells pollution permits through quarterly auctions, and these proceeds are in turn used to invest in local environmental benefits such as upgrading heating and air-conditioning and weatherizing homes. By making collective progressive decreases on carbon emissions, RGGI actually works as a bipartisan mechanism to improve the root of the climate change problem as a mitigation strategy. Additionally, the state of Massachusetts recently demonstrated effective climate change efforts by signing legislation known as "An Act Promoting Climate Change Adaptation, Environmental and Natural Resource Protection and Investment in Recreational Assets and Opportunity." This piece of legislation authorizes $2.4 billion in capital allocation for investments

towards improving statewide resiliency and natural resource protection. By combining both adaptation and regional mitigation strategies, Massachusetts has created an effective, wide spanning bipartisan climate action plan that protects both residents and the natural ecosystem in Massachusetts. When compared to recent local and federal efforts, I believe the state of Massachusetts has the potential to make the most effective climate policy.

Climate change presents a unique problem to policymakers at both the local, state, and federal level. Within the last decade, this inaction problem has been exacerbated by the increasingly polarizing nature of issues surrounding climate change. While the most long lasting and widespread positive impact will likely require participation at the local, state, federal, and international level, I believe the current political climate in the United States positions the state level to be the most promising governing body.