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BUSINESS

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University hosts extensive debate on climate change

by **George Hohmann**
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CHARLESTON, W.Va.--Cap and trade would be another expensive government boondoggle or it would create a new market for energy technologies and help save the earth, depending on whom you believe.

Patrick Michaels, a senior fellow in environmental studies at The Cato Institute, and David Hawkins, director of climate programs at the National Resources Defense Council, debated cap and trade and climate change for an hour and a half Monday evening.

They disagreed on almost everything, except that the future belongs to the energy efficient.

Although they disagreed, they did so respectfully and thoughtfully before a large crowd at the University of Charleston's Geary Auditorium.

Under cap-and-trade legislation, emissions of heat-trapping gases from power plants and other big emitters would face increasingly more stringent limits, or caps. Companies could invest in pollution-reducing technologies or buy and sell permits to meet the cap - the trade portion.

Hawkins said that under the bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives last summer, the cap on total pollution would begin at about today's levels and be gradually reduced until, in 2050, it would be 83 percent below today's levels.

Michael said an 83 percent reduction in emissions would put the average American back at an emission level last recorded in this country in 1867. "No one knows how to do this," he said. "No one knows how to reduce emissions nearly that much because we don't have that technology."

Hawkins said it's like having your doctor say you need to lose 50 pounds and you respond that you don't know how.

"The doctor isn't saying you should lose 50 pounds all at once. He says do what you can today and we'll see what we can do tomorrow. That's how this is going to proceed."

Michael said that when gasoline went to \$4 a gallon, Americans cut their use by 4 percent. "How expensive will your energy have to be to cut your energy consumption 83 percent?" he asked.

Hawkins said the purpose of the legislation is not to make energy more expensive but to create a new market.

"When we created a market for personal computers we created a market that rewarded people for making computers smaller, faster, and that use less energy," he said. "If you do the same thing with energy technology, the market would take care of itself."

According to Hawkins, governments needs to establish a market for new energy technologies because "global warming affects all of the atmosphere and we don't get the benefits we want by simply purchasing a smarter light bulb or insulating our homes."

Michael said congressional passage of cap-and-trade legislation will not matter if China and India don't agree to lower their emissions, too.

Hawkins said, "What do we do with the fact that nations must cooperate - sit back, cross our arms and say, 'You first'? We've been doing this for 20 years. We have an opportunity to break through that, say we're willing to try this, get them to say the same. We can find ways to cooperate."

The University of Charleston, the Charleston Gazette and the Charleston Daily Mail sponsored the debate.

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