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Phil Sharp

President of Resources for the Future

Following a long career in public service that included 10 terms as a member of the US House of Representatives from Indiana, 1975 to 1995, **Phil Sharp** became president of Resources for the Future in 2005. Resources for the Future is a non-profit think tank that studies unwanted impacts of human activities on the population. It aims at quantifying these impacts, and to compare the cost of environmental damage to the cost of mitigation.

Sharp was a lecturer at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and directed Harvard's Institute of Politics. He was later appointed to the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future and to The National Academies' Committee on America's Climate Choices.

Sharp is chair of the Board of Directors of the Energy Foundation. He serves on the MIT Energy Initiative External Advisory Board and chairs its advisory committees for studies on the future of solar energy and the utility of the future.

Subject Area/Topic: Climate Change

Highlights: Sharp began by stating that "...climate change is not a normal political issue [because] the science underlying it is complex with lots of issues and is easy to distort." An additional problem is "...people who look for science advice in the Book of Genesis." Until recently, Sharp said, climate change was viewed as being somewhere in the future. Now, however, there is evidence that change is happening on a global scale.

Sharp stated that "our economists have found that if you establish a carbon tax you could ameliorate the problem." However, he believes that such a system of carbon taxes is only politically feasible if the monies collected are broadly redistributed to provide public benefits.

The politics of climate change has changed very significantly in recent years. President Nixon sponsored the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency and both parties supported a wide variety of actions designed to protect the air and the environment. When George W. Bush was first running for President, he said that he would regulate emissions. Now, the parties are sharply opposed. Key to the change is the fact that "...when I was in Congress, [1975-95] both parties were coalitions—this is not so now."

However, Sharp is hopeful. Polling conducted jointly by Resources for the Future and the New York Times found broad-based public concern about climate change. He believes that repositioning is underway among many Republicans because it is no longer politically feasible in their district or state to be a denier. "The good news [he said] is that we are moving; the bad news is that we are probably 20 years late."