

Review: Changing Climates in North American Politics

Henrik Selin and Stacy D. VanDeveer (Eds.)

Reviewed by Byron Anderson
Northern Illinois University, USA

Selin, Henrik and VanDeveer, Stacy D. (Eds.). *Changing Climates in North American Politics: Institutions, Policymaking, and Multilevel Governance*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009. xiv, 338pp. ISBN 9780262012997.US\$52, cloth. ISBN 9780262512862.US\$26, paper. Printed on recycled paper.

Changing Climates "...examines causes and implications of climate change-related political action in North America, from continental to local governance levels, involving a wide range of public, private, and civil society actors" (pp. 3-4). The fifteen chapters, authored by academics in their respective areas of expertise, introduce new or emerging institutions, policies and practices in North American climate governance. The effectiveness of North American climate change governance is explored across multiple jurisdictions that include leadership measures taken by cities, states and provinces, the actions of corporations, college campuses and the media, and the impact of NAFTA and the Arctic.

Climate change governance is unpopular, difficult to implement, and involves multiple jurisdictions. Climate change is global in origin and the effects may not be experienced for long periods of time. Benefits can be plagued by scientific uncertainties and costly to address. Solutions may involve major lifestyle changes. These realities make successful policymaking very difficult.

There is a wide array of books on climatic change, but most focus on broader topics, for example, international climate policy, environmental justice, and political responsibility. *Changing Climates* is unique in its focus on North America and politics. The book provides a broad overview of the prevailing state of North American politics and climate change governance. Distinctions in carbon governance are made between the United States, Canada and Mexico.

North American climate change governance is characterized as having a localized bottom-up approach, rather than a centralized top-down approach. The bottom-up approach is very different from the top-down approach used by the European Union and other large governing authorities. Many examples are provided of the bottom-up approach, for instance, the five U.S. states that have written green house gas (GHG) reduction goals into state law and the roles played by colleges and universities in the curriculum, operations, and research. Bottom-up leadership can also be found coming from corporations acting as major influences in carbon governance. While these bottom-up examples are significant and important they are also uncoordinated and diffuse making them less effective and falling short of what is needed.

The volume is part of The MIT Press's American and Comparative Environmental Policy series. Notes and references are with each chapter. The book should appeal to environmental academics, policymakers, activists, students, and others with a strong interest in the topic. Recommended for academic, research, and specialized environmental collections.

Byron Anderson <banderson@niu.edu>, Associate Dean/Public Services, Northern Illinois University Libraries, DeKalb, IL 60115 USA. TEL: 815-753-9804, FAX: 815-753-9803.

Electronic Green Journal, Issue 30, Spring 2010, ISSN:1076-7975