

For the climate, let's do our part

BY MARK JOHNSTON

In recent years, residents of Central Washington have become all too familiar with examples of how climate change threatens our way of life and future. It's a well known fact that weather conditions atypical of the past are increasingly affecting living conditions here and across the world. Most evident in Washington are the wildfires of recent years and threats to our region's water supplies, and thereby agriculture, homeowners, and fish and wildlife. This may sound like an exaggeration to some, but it's not. This is what we face. It's up to us to do something about it, and we don't have much time.

The Washington Carbon Emissions Tax and Sales Tax Reduction Initiative (I-732) offers Washington voters the opportunity to take meaningful and effective action on global warming this November. In recent years, Washington has been at the forefront of efforts to move away from carbon-based energy in favor of cleaner sources. I-732 makes sense and is the next logical step in that process.

If enacted, I-732 would impose a \$25 per ton tax on carbon emissions

coupled with a 1 percent reduction in the state sales tax, while significantly lowering the business and occupation tax on manufacturers and making rebates of up to \$1,500 per year available to low income families to offset higher energy costs. As such, it's designed to make a significant dent in Washington's contributions to climate change in a revenue neutral way, while cushioning the effect of higher energy prices on low-income individuals and making sure living-wage jobs remain in Washington state.

Fortunately, we have a relevant example to our north that provides support for this approach. In 2008, British Columbia enacted legislation very similar to I-732. By 2014 it had produced the desired results, with B.C. residents consuming 16 percent less fuel per person that year while the same measure for the rest of Canada rose by 3 percent. Studies also show that over the same period the province's economy has tracked that of Canada as a whole, so evidence that the measure has led to economic decline is lacking. Moreover, B.C.'s carbon tax legislation has led to the creation of over 200 renewable energy companies over the same period.

One of the toughest things about this issue is that the causes have become worldwide in nature, and because of this the required solutions are as well. Each city, county, state, and country has contributed to the problem and is responsible for acting locally to solve it. Regarding this aspect of the situation, some make the argument that I-732 will not fix the problem by itself. This is true, but Washington needs to do its part. I-732 represents an important step we can take now and is the only currently proposed plan to meet Washington's legislated emission targets by 2020.

We often hear about how the actions of those of us living today will affect future generations. This fairly general statement may seem a bit overused, but in this particular case it is not an exaggeration. Global warming is a threat to life as we know it on this planet, and that includes us. Time is of the essence. If we truly care about generations to come, we have a responsibility to take effective action on this issue. I-732 is tailored to do just that and deserves your vote.

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