

WHITMAN COUNTY GAZETTE

Letter: Another perspective

Thursday, April 28, 2016

The April 14 Gazette carried an extensive article liberally quoting three elected representatives from our district, Sen. Mark Schoesler, and Reps. Mary Dye and Joe Schmick, on their opposition to Initiative 732, scheduled for the November ballot.

Although the article contains many misleading statements, one comment by Rep. Schmick deserves support: "I think every voter should be educated so they know what they're voting for."

In that spirit, I'd like to offer some other perspectives.

Initiative 732 is designed to make pollution more expensive by taxing carbon dioxide created by various forms of fossil fuel. On April 19th, CNN praised this initiative as helping "account for the very real social costs of burning carbon."

The concept has "broad support from...the right and left," according to CNN. "Economists, environmentalists, climate scientists—even oil execs at Exxon Mobil—back the theory," preferring it to other methods of eliminating carbon emissions. Alternatives cited include strict environmental rules for industrial polluters or subsidizing renewable energy.

This "theory" has been proven to work in our neighboring province, British Columbia, which in 2008 implemented a carbon tax similar to that proposed in Initiative 732. The economy there has grown, according to CNN. Clean-tech jobs are booming, and pollution is way down. And the tax is revenue-neutral, meaning other taxes are reduced to counterbalance it.

Because of the carbon tax, B.C. carbon emissions are down 5-15 percent, and the economy "slightly outpaced the rest of Canada." Fuel use dropped 16 percent between

2008 and 2013, while rising three percent in the rest of Canada, and clean energy jobs are up 12.5 percent, according to the B.C. premier's office.

In fact, "more than 130 businesses recently sent a letter to the premier asking for a higher tax," CNN reported.

B.C.'s neighbor Alberta accounts for 62.8 percent of Canada's fossil energy production, while B.C. is second with 14.1 percent. Last week the Edmonton Journal reported that many in Alberta were looking forward to a similar carbon levy to take effect January 1, 2017.

The article cited Alberta Environment Minister Shannon Phillips as saying that the tax will ultimately save money and reduce the amount of greenhouse gas produced. The carbon tax will reduce emissions between 20 to 35 megatonnes over the next five years, Phillips said.

Revenue will be spent on green infrastructure, renewable energy projects, and a new energy efficiency agency. It will also go toward rebates, with 60 percent of Alberta households receiving a full rebate, and partial rebates going to an additional six percent.

CNN called Washington's proposal "a brilliant first step" because it has opened a "much-needed conversation about the cost of carbon pollution." In addition, researchers from the Brookings Institution, Harvard University, and others have lauded the idea.

Similar carbon pricing systems have been adopted or planned in 40 countries and more than 20 cities, according to the World Bank. China, the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gasses, has announced a national carbon trading market for 2017.

And this is not new. When I taught in China, I saw windfarms outside Beijing near the border of Inner Mongolia—in 1998.

As a final comment, CNN noted that if Washington passes a carbon tax, there's reason to believe other states will follow, and that "places like British Columbia will be able...to phase out pollution entirely." Momentum from this initiative could have striking results throughout the United States.

On a similar note, the BBC last week published an article headlined "Pressure grows for price on carbon ahead of UN signing." It described world leaders and international finance chiefs urging rapid expansion of carbon pollution pricing.

The "UN signing" referred to was on Earth Day, last Friday, when 175 governments sign the Paris Climate Change Agreement. That's only 20 fewer nations than those involved in the original agreement in Paris four months earlier.

Also last week 250 faith leaders called for wide-spread signing of the agreement. The fact that 175 governments, an unprecedented number, did sign it signifies far-reaching international agreement on the issue of climate change.

In supporting Initiative 732, Washington has a singular opportunity to lead the United States in contributing to an active solution of the global climate change problem. It's worth looking into.

As Rep. Schmick noted, "every voter should be educated so they know what they are voting for."

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