

The Eagle-Tribune

Column: Green energy plan should protect, support our communities

By Rep. Frank A. Moran and the Rev. Joel Almono
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Rep. Frank Moran, D-Lawrence
Roger Darrigrand



Father Joel Almono, rector of the Grace Episcopal Church
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With the start of the new Massachusetts legislative sessions last January, legislators are considering several different proposals to tackle climate change. We are writing today as a political leader and a faith leader to urge everyone to take time to learn about these issues, and when you do, we ask you to support H2810, “An Act to Promote Green Infrastructure and Reduce Carbon Emissions.”

This letter presents a unique opportunity for a leader in the state Legislature to join one in our faith community in support of legislation that will benefit not just this generation but every generation to come. Environmental justice and creation care are at the forefront of our priorities, respectively.

This is important to all of us because fossil fuel use is negatively affecting our lives and affecting all of us.

Lawrence should never have experienced the gas explosions and loss of life last fall. Our loved ones should not still be recovering from the hurricane in Puerto Rico — made so devastating by climate change. None of us should suffer from asthma or heart disease because the air we breathe is polluted.

We should not have to worry about the Dominican Republic being one of the most at-risk countries due to the flooding and storms projected for the island as the global climate continues to change.

Massachusetts needs to act now, during this legislative session, and the action we take has to be proportionate to the challenge we face.

But as we confront the huge crisis of climate change — and the public health impacts of fossil fuels — we know that many in our communities are struggling just to manage their household bills or keep their businesses afloat. We need a bold approach, one that also protects and supports low- and moderate-income people.

Introduced in January 2019 by Rep. Jennifer Benson, D-Lunenburg, H2810 does three things: It establishes a carbon fee for Massachusetts; returns most of the revenues from that fee to Massachusetts households and businesses; and invests the remainder in local renewable energy, energy efficiency, clean transportation and resilience projects.

A carbon fee is a charge on gas, oil and coal, based on the amount of carbon dioxide these fuels emit when burned. With a carbon fee, the price of dirty fuels increases slowly, creating an incentive for all of us to use less and move to greener options.

But isn't increasing costs a bad thing? Yes, nobody wants to pay more. Massachusetts already has a high cost of living.

That's why 70% of the revenues from the proposed carbon fee will be given back to Massachusetts residents and businesses, in the form of rebates. The rebates are calculated so that most low- and moderate-income people will get back more in rebates than their projected increase in energy costs. That is the protection part of the bill.

The remaining revenue from the carbon fee — a projected \$400 million to \$600 million per year — will be invested in things that reduce pollution like new transit lines, renewable energy at schools and municipal buildings, and community solar programs that allow renters and people in multi-family buildings to take advantage of the benefits of solar. Funds can also be used for projects that help us adapt to climate change, like community cooling centers.

To make sure that everybody benefits, H2810 requires that 40% of investments be directed to low-income households, those with incomes below 60% of the median, and communities.

In addition, \$16 million to \$28 million of the funds raised each year will be added to the state's Fuel Assistance program, for direct financial assistance to households.

This is the support part of the bill.

The carbon fee that is being debated in the House this session is truly innovative. It is one of the most effective policies Massachusetts could enact to drive down greenhouse gas emissions.

It is also one of the first carbon fee proposals ever to focus on equity, ensuring both protection of low- and moderate-income households and investment in our communities.

H2810 is good for our community, good for our planet, and good for future generations.

Please give it your support.

Rep. Frank Moran represents the 17th Essex District serving Lawrence, Andover and Methuen. The Rev. Joel Almono is rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Lawrence.