



Storm surge from January 4 "bomb cyclone" overruns Boston streets.

Mass. must lead on climate change

Price, or fee, on carbon pollution is the key

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ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL IMAGES from last winter's 100-year storms was the photograph of General Electric's future Boston home submerged under water. It served as a strong warning of the consequences if we fail to act boldly in the fight against climate change.

In this final month of the state Legislature's formal session, our representatives have an opportunity to take the common sense next step in this fight and demonstrate the leadership for which Massachusetts is justifiably famous.

Legislation in the Senate and House would establish an economy-wide fee, or price, on the carbon pollution that is threatening our health, our shoreline, our businesses, farms, fisheries, and the well-being of our children. The revenue from this pollution fee, charged to fossil fuel importers, could be captured and returned to residents and businesses, and some could be used to invest in our shift to clean energy.

We already charge a modest fee for this pollution in the electricity sector, through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which helped reduce power plant emissions in the Northeast by 39.6 percent between 2007 and 2015, or twice the national rate. As a result of this and other clean energy policies, power plants now account for less than 20 percent of emissions in Massachusetts.

But that will not be enough to achieve our legal mandate to cut overall greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent below the 1990 level by 2050. We must address the other economic sectors that emit carbon pollution, primarily from the burning of fossil fuels and bioenergy. We also must mobilize our natural systems such as forests, wetlands, and soils to sequester additional carbon dioxide.

There are several important policies and programs that can help us achieve our goals, but putting a price on carbon pollution not only is the single most effective tool, it also boosts the effectiveness of every other clean energy policy by providing strong economic incentives to move more quickly toward local efficiency and renewable energy.

Each year, Massachusetts residents and businesses spend about \$20 billion to import fossil fuels. Keeping more of our energy dollars in the state by using local energy such as wind and solar will help grow local businesses and jobs and boost the renewable energy sector that will give us a stronger, more reliable energy foundation.

Without intervention, the costs of climate change will continue to increase and become more unpredictable, and our residents and businesses simply cannot afford them. The Northeast will be harder hit by climate change than most other regions, and already our average temperatures have

climbed higher than those for the country as a whole. An accumulating body of evidence indicates that the pace of climate change is accelerating faster than scientists had predicted, and our response must become stronger.

Legislators who act to protect our communities will have the clear support of the state's science, business, faith, academic, and community leaders. The Alliance for Business Leadership, a separate coalition of nearly 200 business leaders, and most recently National Grid have all called for economy-wide carbon pollution pricing.

Nearly 300 faith leaders in Massachusetts have signed a letter endorsing a price on carbon pollution. Separately, Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Boston, was among nearly 600 religious and scientific leaders who urged policymakers to address the climate crisis "with the boldness and urgency it requires, with substantive and immediate action."

The Senate recently passed carbon pollution pricing as part of its energy bill, and the House has completed its energy legislation. Both branches now have a chance to collaborate in conference in order to achieve a fair and equitable carbon pricing policy that works for all Massachusetts residents and businesses.

Other states around the country, especially in the Northeast, are looking to us for leadership, especially neighboring states whose own legislation contains language that triggers action once Massachusetts acts. This chain reaction also can have a huge economic impact: the combined gross domestic product of the states currently considering carbon pricing legislation in the region – Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont – constitutes the world's seventh largest economy.

At a time when the federal government is unable to act on climate change, Massachusetts must assume its historic role as a leader on the tough issues, and show the way for the rest of the country.

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