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On Oct 20, 2018, at 4:08 PM, Miner, Robert <[redacted]@bp.com> wrote:

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The Seattle Times recommends: No on Initiative 1631

Originally published October 20, 2018 at 11:46 am
<image001.jpg>Tesoro Corporation's Anacortes oil refinery, one of five refineries in Washington state subject to Initiative 1631. Voters should reject I-1631 and instead demand the state strengthen regulations directly reducing pollution, and continue making strong investments in alternative energy, conservation and clean technologies. (Ted S. Warren / AP, File)
Climate change is a crisis needing an aggressive, coordinated response, not expensive and unaccountable spending measures like Initiative 1631.

Voters concerned about the environment, the cost of living and the sustainability of Washington's economy should reject this dubious approach.

Instead, Washington should coordinate its response with other states, to prevent cross-border job losses. It should also seek a national carbon tax. I-1631 could set that back, because it's so porous, lacking accountability and larded with special-interest payouts.

The state should also strengthen regulations directly reducing pollution, and continue making strong investments in alternative energy, conservation and clean technologies.

Legislators repeatedly declined to impose carbon taxes proposed by Gov. Jay Inslee and voters soundly rejected one in 2016.

Now comes I-1631, repackaged as a carbon fee. In one key respect – accountability – it's the worst of the bunch. It would collect more than $1 billion yearly. An un-elected board appointed by the governor would propose how to spend it. The initiative requires seats for powerful entities, such as labor and tribes, promising them large cuts.

The Legislature has the final say on appropriations. But the carbon board is structured to be a political juggernaut. Legislators might have difficulty mustering political will to change course.

Global warming is critical. But I-1631 is not do-or-die. Sponsors opposed the 2016 carbon-tax initiative. It aspired to be revenue neutral, by cutting other taxes, and didn't fund their wish list.

Meanwhile emissions are decreasing nationally and in Washington, one of the lowest emitting states. Hundreds of millions are being invested here in renewable energy, conservation, forests and habitat.

State projections say emissions will decrease substantially without Initiative 1631. Over 10 years, emissions from energy consumption will decline 9.6 percent with no carbon charge, according to a climate model used in the Office of Financial Management's fiscal analysis.

Gasoline emissions decrease 18.5 percent without I-1631. How these figures will be affected by I-1631 investments is unclear until specific projects are implemented.

Every little bit helps, but at what cost?

For gasoline, it's equivalent to another gas tax, starting around 14 cents and increasing at least 2 cents yearly. Electricity prices would rise more than 2 percent and natural gas up to 8.5 percent, per the state model.

No, "big polluters" won't bear these costs. Look at any utility or cable bill to see how taxes and fees are passed to consumers.

I-1631 also discriminates by geography. Away from Seattle's abundant transit and moderate climate, in the rest of Washington where most live, it's a largely inescapable, regressive tax especially on middle income families.

Everyone would pay more for housing, food and other goods, because higher energy prices increase their cost.

The initiative attempts to offset economic harm to the poor with heating rebates, weatherization and transit spending. But these are already provided with subsidies, and won't reduce the burden of higher gas prices.

Families will pay but many large polluters won't, because of loopholes. Manufacturers selling overseas and farms are exempt and utilities can offset charges with credits.

Farm groups are still opposed because higher transportation costs hurt their competitiveness. Higher energy costs also fall hard on their workers, driving long distances in rural areas.

Some I-1631 fees would finance emission-reducing projects by large investor-owned utilities. But many such investments are expected regardless of I-1631. The degree of additional investment the measure would prompt is unclear. What is clear, though, is that it shifts the funding burden to residents.

"The smart grid, it's happening — it doesn't have to be legislated,'' said Kent Lopez, Washington Rural Electric Cooperative Association general manager. It's opposed because I-1631's credits don't pencil out for small utilities he represents. They'll invest in efficiency anyway.

The question is not whether to reduce emissions. Of course we should; that's happening now. Rather, should residents fund I-1631's spending with soaring energy costs?

If that would stop the impacts of global warming on this state, it might be worthwhile. But I-1631 won't make that happen.

Vote no and demand a better and more accountable plan for combating climate change.

The Seattle Times editorial board *members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Donna Gordon Blankinship, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Melissa Santos, and William K. Blethen (emeritus).*

Robert Miner
Head of State and Local Affairs
BP America
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