

# League of Women Voters get climate presentation

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Although COVID-19 remains a priority for the county, state and country, if we want to prevent future such outbreaks, we would do well to address climate change.

That was the assessment of Nick Manning, climate and health program manager with the Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility (WPSR) Climate Program, which advocates for clean energy and climate justice.

He addressed a Zoom meeting of the Climate Change Committee of the League of Women Voters of Mason County on Aug. 13.

Manning, a Seattle native, has worked in Washington, D.C., and Portland, Maine, on environmental initiatives in the private and nonprofit sectors. Prior to joining WPSR, he worked for the Center for Environmental Law and Policy (CELP).

Manning explained WPSR was founded in 1979 to address nuclear weapons, without any initial focus on its current concerns of climate and economic inequality. The doctors who originally comprised the nonprofit sought to abolish nuclear weapons, but over time, it evolved to cover issues such as the health impacts of climate change.

## Trying to control carbon emissions

Manning then offered a precise history of the two previous carbon tax initiatives that both failed: Initiative 732, which failed in 2016 after being voted down 59.3% to 40.7%; and Initiative 1631, which failed in 2018 56.56% to 43.44%.

"It's a weird story, because Washington, on paper, wants a carbon tax," said Manning, who cited KING 5 News polling showing that 76.23% of the state is either "extremely" or "somewhat" concerned about climate change, and supportive of climate action.

Manning acknowledged that Washingtonians' voting records reveal a "disconnect" with those supposed priorities, especially since he touted Initiative 1631's "reinvestment language" and "due diligence to engage as many communities and people as possible" to build broad support among constituencies who hadn't backed carbon taxes before, such as labor.

Manning identified the biggest difference between the two initiatives as being that 732 came with a higher cost, but was revenue-neutral, while 1631 offered a lower price by being

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*Nick Manning, climate and health program manager  
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility*

revenue-generating, so while 732 would have achieved greater outright emissions reductions, 1631 would have relied heavily on reinvesting its carbon revenues to achieve the same levels of reductions.

"Initiative 732 proposed to cut taxes in other areas to make up for the tax on carbon, and return that money to the taxpayers, essentially being revenue-neutral," Manning said, "while Initiative 1631 didn't do that, but it reinvested the money that was generated from the tax into climate resilience and mitigation."

Although 732 theoretically should have garnered more bipartisan support, and even scored the endorsements of several conservative economists, Manning credited the slightly larger margin for 1631 to its focus on building coalitions out of disparate demographics prior to the development of its policies, as well as its reinvestments in the communities most affected by such a tax.

"The issue with (Initiative 732) is that it ignored equity, especially in Washington, which has such a regressive tax code, relying so much on sales tax, that people bearing the brunt of that tax need to be compensated for the disproportionate impact of that tax," Manning said.

One strike that Manning counted against Initiative 1631 was opponents' ability to muster the money and organization to counter the efforts of the coalition on behalf of the initiative.

"Oil and gas raised \$20 million like that," Manning said, snapping his fingers, "and the entire coalition, with all its resources, could raise \$5 million over the course of the entire campaign."

In spite of this setback, Manning noted the coalition's infrastructure has remained in place, and continues to advocate for equity concerns in various policy proposals across Washington.

Although King and Jefferson counties were the only counties to vote in favor of Initiative 1631, its coalition of supporters have shifted to implementing pieces of the initiative individually,

which Manning sees as a smart response to how "exhausted" he believes Washingtonians have become with such initiatives.

## Virus complicates the long game

Unfortunately for the multiyear strategies that were developed to pass those proposals piecemeal, the COVID-19 outbreak derailed those plans by displacing climate concerns in the priorities of both the state and the individual communities most affected by such climate initiatives, the latter of whom Manning noted also tended to be among the hardest hit by the pandemic.

Manning introduced the "Just Recovery Program" that's being developed, to serve as a response to both COVID-19 and climate change by investing in the long-term resilience of at-risk workers, low-income communities, communities of color and tribal communities.

"COVID has highlighted some really obvious flaws in our health care system," Manning said, "and also, the disproportionate impacts on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People Of Color) communities from climate change specifically, because a lot of the health impacts from climate change map directly with COVID."

While specific policy proposals are being worked out, Manning advocated for the need to codify environmental justice concerns into the state's policies and funding priorities, as well as progressive revenues sources for transportation investments that would benefit affected communities, including reducing both vehicle miles traveled and fossil fuel consumption.

Manning listed a number of proposed methods to furnish progressive funding for climate resilience programs, from a capital gains tax to yet another attempt at a carbon tax, but he conceded the underlying issues with the state's tax code would ulti-

mately need to be addressed.

Manning explained the Washington Climate Caucus had taken up the cause of not only clean fuel standards — which have already been adopted by Oregon, California and British Columbia — but also building electrification.

Given the state's budget shortfall, Manning emphasized the importance of highlighting the links between air pollution and COVID.

"We're really going to try and link climate and COVID to prevent future issues," Manning said. "Because if you don't want this to happen again, we need to do something about climate now."

According to Manning, a clean fuel standard for Washington would require oil refiners and importers to reduce the carbon intensity of fuels by 20% by 2035, thereby improving public health and saving on health care costs.

"Diesel and gas account for almost 50% of climate pollution in Washington," Manning said, adding that a clean fuel standard "has the potential to create more homegrown jobs in the production of clean, low-carbon fuels."

A clean fuel standard previously made it through the state House of Representatives last year before dying in the Senate, but it's back on the ballot this year.

Building electrification aims to circumvent the burning of fossil fuels in residential or commercial buildings, which Manning reported contributes at least 9% of the carbon emissions in Washington.

Manning cited data indicating that banning gas in new construction would yield benefits for the climate and people's health, and pointed out Washington's electricity is not only the least carbon-intensive in the country, but is also getting cleaner by the year.

"Burning gas and fossil fuels in residential buildings (...) it's been tied to asthma," Manning said, "it's been tied to pulmonary disease, it's been tied to childhood development issues, it's been tied to cancer, and a lot of it, we really don't know what the impacts are."

Last year, a building electrification bill passed out of the House Environment Committee, but did not pass a second reading in the Rules Committee. Not only will it be back on the ballot, but Manning credited a number of local coalitions with taking up this cause.

■ **EDITORS NOTE:** Check the Aug. 27 issue of the *Shelton-Mason County Journal* to see what steps Nick Manning suggests county residents could take, as well as some of the feedback he received from residents.