

Oregon: 'Now is your time'

Green For All's Michelle Romero wants the Beaver State to follow California's lead: Price carbon emissions and reinvest the revenue in communities most affected by climate change

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

Lawmakers in Salem are considering five different bills with the same goal of significantly reducing Oregon's greenhouse gas emissions.

Two of the proposed bills would create a cap and trade program, two would create a cap-and-price permitting program and the other would create a carbon tax.

A public hearing on these bills before a joint meeting of Oregon's House and Senate environmental committees on March 1 was packed, with names of testifiers filling five pages.

The overwhelming majority of public comment was in support of passing some sort of legislation to rein in carbon emissions, with many endorsing Senate Bill 557 specifically. This bill would implement an incrementally decreasing cap on the state's total greenhouse gas emissions and create a carbon pollution market for sources emitting more than 25,000 metric tons of carbon or carbon-equivalent greenhouse gases per year.

While 10 states already have a carbon-pricing market in place, SB 557 is most similar to the cap and trade system California adopted in early 2012.

California invests gains from its carbon market into green projects in communities most affected by climate change.

A driving force behind this investment strategy was the Oakland, Calif.-based nonprofit Green For All. Founded by CNN commentator Van Jones in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Green For All is focused on initiatives across the U.S. that use polluters' dollars to fund green economy projects in low-income areas.

Green For All Deputy Director Michelle Romero traveled to Oregon to offer the support of Green For All to lawmakers should they pass Bill 557, which includes provisions for investing carbon market

revenue in economically depressed communities.

"I'm here because we've been watching Oregon for a while and believe now is your time," she said at the public hearing.

Earlier that day, Romero sat down with Street Roots at Climate Solutions' office in Old Town to discuss how Oregon's most vulnerable communities could benefit from a carbon-pricing program.

Before coming to Green For All in early 2016, Romero, 29, spent the bulk of her burgeoning career at the Greenlining Institute, working to bring historically marginalized voices into the democratic processes.

Emily Green: *I was hoping you could tell our readers about Green For All's agenda to "promote a clean-energy economy to solve the urgent problems of both our economy and our environment." Can you give me a couple of examples of what that looks like on the ground?*

Michelle Romero: One way to grow the green economy is to dedicate investments in growing that economy in communities that are on the frontlines of some of the worst pollution.

We need to reverse the damage of the fossil fuel industry and help clean up and green up these communities. In California, for example, where our director, Vien Truong, helped lead the fight to get a billion-dollar fund for disadvantaged communities, we're seeing things now like electric van pools in migrant farmworker towns where there wasn't an established bus line; we're seeing 400 opportunities in just one city to work in the solar industry, putting solar

panels on affordable apartment buildings near transit; we're looking at thousands of trees going into urban communities affected by traffic congestion to help clean the air there and create good green space. And in some places, we're helping communities do really innovative things like transform a third-acre lot of unused public land into a green space with fruit trees that is creating healthy foods for the community, job

training around community gardening, and things like that.

There have been solar investments in communities across California. One area was out in Fresno, for example. Our central valley region can get really hot.



MICHELLE ROMERO,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, GREEN FOR ALL

For one woman (Maria Zavala), what that investment in solar meant was that her – and she was a single mother supporting her kids after the loss of her husband just a year prior – her electric bill went from \$200 a month to as low as \$1.50 a month.

(This reduction in energy cost is also attributed to a new energy-efficient home Zavala helped SelfHelp Enterprises build before she moved into it. This nonprofit helps low-income residents in the San Joaquin Valley, known as the world's most productive agricultural area, achieve homeownership by using sweat equity as a down payment.)

E.G.: *Where did that billion-dollar fund for disadvantaged communities come from?*

M.R.: That money comes from polluters. The cost of carbon pollution is not free – families and workers, we pay with our shortened lifespans as a result of cancer, asthma, pollution-related disease. We're paying an increased produce cost at the

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