

Endorsement: Portland Clean Energy Fund

When the air is thick with the smoke from forest fires, it is people on the streets who have to breathe that air day and night. They are the ones most punished by extreme heat, extreme cold, storms – the troubling weather of a disrupted climate.

And when people live inside houses, it's the poor who are most affected by energy costs – eating up a larger portion of their paycheck compared to people with higher incomes. Recurring costs like utilities and rent are the most frequent reason people take out

payday loans, a course that only exacerbates poverty. It's a damaging, regressive system.

Measure 26-201 – The Portland Clean Energy Fund – is a thoughtful response to these multiple challenges. That's why Street Roots endorses it.

The Portland Clean Energy Fund supports progressive efforts to shift our city away from fossil-fuel reliance and offer some relief for people struggling to stay afloat in their own homes.

This week, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres called climate change “a direct existential threat,” describing the “trail of death and devastation” from wildfires, storms and extreme weather. “Nothing less than our future and the fate of humankind depends on how we rise to the climate challenge,” Guterres said.

And yet, the Trump administration continues to just push us closer to that brink by withdrawing from the Paris Agreement and supporting fossil fuel industries. Just this week the EPA proposed easing monitoring of methane gas leaks, which are common occurrence in the extraction and transportation of natural gas, particularly through fracking. On and on, the Trump administration is sending us further into climate distress.

Local governments have to act. Last year, Portland City Council resolved to move the city to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050, extending the 2015 Climate Action Plan, a collaboration between the City of Portland and Multnomah County. The Portland Clean Energy Fund lays some of the groundwork, designed with extensive consultation from communities of color, including NAACP Portland Branch, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), Native American Youth and Family Center

(NAYA), Verde, Coalition of Communities of Color, as well as 350PDX and the Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club.

As we address climate change, we must be intentionally equitable. Without that intention, actions can result in more wealth accumulation for the wealthiest among us, exacerbating inequality. The Portland Clean Energy Fund has been designed to support poor communities and communities of color, with both weatherization and efficiency projects that get funded, but also the people who are trained to do that work. In a city in which African Americans, Native Americans and Hawaiian-Pacific Portlanders make on average less than half that of white Portlanders, it matters that these jobs are living wage at more than \$21 an hour.

So how is this funded? Portlander retailers that have more than \$1 billion in annual national sales and \$500,000 in annual Portland sales would pay a 1 percent surcharge on gross retail sales within Portland. Grocery, medicine and health care services are exempt from the tax.

The City Club Report on the Portland Clean Energy Fund estimates that roughly 120 of the top grossing businesses in Portland would be taxed. These are companies that extract tens of millions of dollars from our community, profiting from our appeal to consumers, tourists and high-paying industries. On the other side of that coin, these retailers contribute to carbon

emissions, which affect the poor disproportionately, so the design of this tax is progressive.

The Clean Energy Fund is also constructive, building from what is already in place – the city's Climate Action Plan – by bringing in a wider chorus of voices to design equitable steps forward.

It's going to take real action to move this city away from fossil fuel consumption. Let's make sure that this movement focuses on the poorest of Portlanders, rather than leaving them behind. And yes, this all takes labor. Let's make sure those are good, equitable jobs. Measure 26-201 does this.

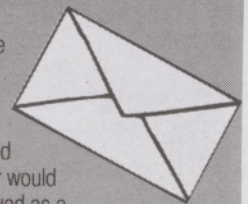
We need to get our city off fossil fuels and we need to put people to work in well-paying jobs. This measure is designed with both aims. It's not often that a proposal can so appropriately address multiple concerns, but Measure 26-201 hits the mark.

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EDITORIAL

Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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