

Issue: New and Dedicated Revenue

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Endorsements:

Proposed Action Agenda Item Title: Carbon Tax

1) Describe the Issue

In an era where very few issues gather broad support from a diversity of political ideologies, access to affordable higher education is agreed to be a fundamental asset in the growth of our economy and the preservation of the American dream of opportunity for all Americans. However, higher education has become less and less accessible over the course of the last few decades. The cost of attending a four-year university has more than doubled in the last 30 years¹ (adjusted for inflation), causing troves of students to rely more heavily on loans (both private and federal), publicly-funded grants, and their parents (for those that have the option to do so). The primary reason for this spike in the cost of tuition is divestment from state governments nationwide, with Washington as a leading example. “Twenty years ago, the state government paid 80 percent of the cost of a student's education and a student paid 20 percent. Today, the state pays 30 percent of the cost, and the student pays 70 percent.”²

Leaving the majority of the cost of education to the student and all of his/her external funding sources creates a significant drag on the economy of both our state and our nation. In addition to driving away many students that would otherwise attend college and become more innovative members of society, leaving students and graduates with such a daunting financial burden influences them to spend less, accept jobs outside of their field of study, and avoid purchasing economically important goods such as houses and cars. Additionally, when tuition was half the cost that it was today, students were able to pay for their entire cost of college through full-time summer jobs and part-time jobs during the school year. Paying for their education primarily through their own labor both gave students a greater sense of responsibility for their academic behavior and gave them greater independence, which fostered greater maturity.

Cutting state funding for such a fundamental public good as higher education is economically and socially irresponsible. A primary reason for the continual underfunding of higher education is a lack of revenue in the state budget. In order to secure adequate funding for Washington's institutions of higher education, new and dedicated revenue must be added to the budget. The most realistic and ethical option to do so is to tax carbon emissions to an ecologically sound level of pollution and dedicate a portion or all of the revenue to higher education.

Tax Carbon:

¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/files/2013/08/education1A.jpg>

² http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2018504888_guest25blakecole.html

The vast majority of scientists agree that emissions of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, have negatively contributed to climate change. British Columbia has successfully implemented revenue neutral carbon tax that charges polluters \$30 per ton of carbon emitted, which “would generate about \$145 billion a year in the United States.”³ For Washington State, “a BC-style carbon tax of \$25 per ton of CO₂” would be about a \$1.7 billion tax shift that could reduce “the state sales tax by a full percentage point, funding the Working Families Sales Tax Rebate, eliminating the B&O business tax for manufacturers, [and] increasing the small business B&O tax credit”.⁴

In instituting a carbon tax and dedicating the revenue to higher education, not only would Washington provide greater opportunity to its citizens, bolstering the economy, but it would also remove the incentive to pollute from companies that have been greatly contributing to climate change. Since the onset of industrialization, society has born the cost of the carbon emissions. Until we remove the profit incentive from overproduction and overconsumption, such carbon emissions will only continue to expand.

2) Strategy Chart.

| Goals | Organizational Considerations | Constituents, Allies, & Opponents | Targets | Tactics |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Long Term</p> <p>Fully and adequately fund higher education with revenue dedicated from a carbon tax.</p> <p>Intermediate</p> <p>Pass carbon tax and lobby legislators to better fund higher education.</p> <p>Short</p> | <p>Partner with the ESP (Environmental and Sustainability Programs)</p> <p>Find which legislators have been friendly in the past to environmental protection and to higher education. Begin working with them.</p> <p>Gain momentum on campus through</p> | <p>Constituents</p> <p>All students, faculty, and parents of students in the state of Washington would benefit from higher education funding, and all residents of Washington would benefit from decreased pollution.</p> <p>Allies</p> <p>Environmentally-friendly legislators and potentially Governor Inslee (he <i>did</i> campaign on clean energy)</p> | <p>Primary</p> <p>Rep. Ross Hunter-D</p> <p>Rep. Larry Seaquist-D</p> <p>Sen. Barbara Bailey-R</p> <p>Secondary</p> <p>Rep. Gary Alexander-R</p> <p>Rep. Dave Upthegrove-D</p> | <p>Campus Collaborations: 1) Days of Action 2) Utilizing Media Outlets 3) Constant Messaging 4) Get out the Vote and Voter education efforts</p> <p>1) Phonebanking, Letter Writing (Letters to the Editors, Letters to elected officials, Emails), Petition Signing, Visual Campaign (Photos, electronic scrap book)</p> <p>2) Social Media Campaign (FB, Twitter, Instagram, tumblr), Campus Newspapers (Campus leaders Letters to the Editor, Editorials,</p> |

³ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/opinion/a-carbon-tax-sensible-for-all.html?_r=0

⁴ <http://carbonwa.org/>

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| <p>Get a carbon tax on the docket of the Washington state legislature.</p> | <p>educating students on state divestment and on the carbon tax. Start campaign (ESP is good at those).</p> <p>Use existing carbon tax reports⁵ to calculate the effect carbon tax revenues could have on higher education.</p> | <p>Legislators friendly to higher education funding.</p> <p>Opponents Any legislators that deny climate change, legislators predatory to environmental protection. Legislators predatory to higher education.</p> <p>Interest Groups</p> <p>Supporters -University Admin -Students -ESP -Washington Environmental Council -Sightline Institute</p> <p>Opponents -Large Polluters -Oil Industry</p> | <p>Sen. Kevin Ranker-D</p> <p>Sen. Doug Ericksen-R</p> <p>Rep. Larry Haler-R</p> <p>Gov. Jay Inslee-D</p> | <p>Columns, Legislative Updates), Coordinated articles and press releases.</p> <p>3) Ensuring that all persons involved in the campaign are using the same messaging and language when talking to legislators, campaigning, and using social media.</p> <p>4) Encouraging students to vote; provide students information regarding new and dedicated a revenue and key elected officials and their role/influence in the process.</p> |
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3. Briefly Explain the Following:

A. Is it winnable?

While passing new revenue in Washington State is extremely difficult, especially given new measures that have passed by initiative, the most likely measure to pass that provides new revenue is a carbon tax. Washington has been a leader in environmental efforts (especially in the Bellingham, Seattle, and Olympia areas), and Governor Inslee recently signed a plan to reduce Washington's impact on the climate⁶. Also, given its potential to replace existing taxes with a consumption-based tax, it's more likely to gain broader support than other revenue-based measures.

B. Does it directly impact and improve students' lives?

⁵ http://daily.sightline.org/files/downloads/2012/07/Sightline_Carbon-Pricing-in-Washington-6.17.10.pdf

⁶ <http://www.pacificcoastcollaborative.org/Documents/Pacific%20Coast%20Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

If some or all of the revenue could get dedicated to higher education, then this measure would directly impact student's lives in the most noticeable and fundamental way. As for the carbon tax, its institution could directly impact not only the lives of students, but of everybody in Washington State.

C. Does it have a clear target?

Our primary targets are as follows:

Representative Larry Seaquist: Democratic Chair of the House Higher Education Committee. He also serves on the House Appropriations Committee and on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Education.

Sen. Barbara Bailey: Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee. She's also the Republican leader in the Senate Majority Coalition Caucus and represents the 10th Legislative District.

Rep. Ross Hunter: Chair of the House Appropriations Committee. Represents the 48th Legislative District.

Our secondary targets are as follows:

Rep. Larry Haler: Republican Ranking Member of the House Higher Education committee, and is very passionate about higher education issues/funding. Represents the 8th Legislative District.

Sen. Doug Ericksen: Republican Chair of the Senate Energy, Environment, & Telecommunications Committee. Represents the 42nd Legislative District.

Rep. Gary Alexander: Republican Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee. Represents the 2nd Legislative District.

Sen. Kevin Ranker: Democratic Ranking Member of the Senate Energy, Environment, & Telecommunications Committee. Represents Western's Legislative District, the 40th, and will therefore be very responsive to our lobbying efforts. Is an outspoken advocate of environmental protection.

Rep. Dave Upthegrove: Democratic Chair of the House Environment Committee. Strong advocate of both environmental protection and improving education. Represents the 33rd Legislative District.

Gov. Jay Inslee: Single most powerful political leader in the state. Has expressed vocally and through his actions that environmental issues are among his top priorities.

4. Does it build a measurable amount of power?

Any issues that involve the affordability, accessibility, and quality of higher education are going to build a measurable amount of power. Additionally, environmental issues are a strong motivator both statewide and on Western's campus. The Environmental and Sustainability Programs have a profound influence at Western, and they would certainly be willing to partner with us in advocating for this issue. The Washington Environmental Council would also likely support the measure.

5. Does it have a clear and realistic time frame?

Yes. It is our intent this year that these revenue policy changes could be introduced to the legislature. The carbon tax could make it onto the legislature's docket in this session, but may take some time to draft. Although there is a British Columbia Carbon Tax model, there is no Washington State model. In addition, measuring carbon emissions require special technology to be purchased and installed on homes, vehicles, stores, factories, etc. The CO₂ emissions calculations that Yoram Bauman and the Sightline Institute used to draft their proposal are from 2004.

6. Does it have a local/state/federal organizing and lobbying angle?

The issue of new and dedicated revenue is an issue that affects all students on every campus, throughout the state and throughout the nation. In a broad sense, this issue absolutely has a local, state, and federal organizing and lobbying angle. In Washington, the lobbying angle comes from environmental groups such as the Washington Environmental Council with support from the Sightline Institute.

7. Could students build a diverse campus coalition around this issue?

Issues, such as finding revenue sources to better fund higher education, are associated with the affordability, accessibility, and quality of higher education in general, which affects all students and therefore it is both deeply and widely felt. Additionally, few students are reluctant to partner around environmental issues. Combining the efforts of environmental groups and students concerned about growing tuition costs will certainly result in a diverse coalition.

8. Is it likely to be debated and acted upon by the Legislature in the next year?

New and dedicated revenue is always a topic of conversation, but some years the conversation is longer than others and some years action is taken and other years it is not. Students will be heavily pushing for at least another year of a tuition freeze and more funding for higher education, which means that these issues will definitely be debated. However, since this is not a budget year, we are not sure if this will be acted upon.

9. Will it strengthen and expand efforts within WWU?

Yes because funding higher education and keeping tuition low is a priority for all students. By dedicating time and energy into this issue, we will be able to mobilize more students into

engaging in the political process. Students are often turned away from political activism because they feel as though their voices are not heard or the issues do not concern them. In combining higher education funding with environmental protection, two issues that plague most of our students, we could encourage more students to get and stay engaged.

10. Can you provide background information and the current context of the issue?

The carbon tax is the farthest thing from a fringe issue in Washington right now. Ever since British Columbia passed its own highly successful carbon tax, talks have circulated among media outlets, think tanks, and public officials in Washington of the state instituting its own carbon tax. Yoram Bauman, an environmental economist at the University of Washington, has repeatedly called for a carbon tax, writing an op-ed in the New York Times⁷, giving a Ted Talk at the Evergreen State College⁸, and publishing a previously-cited report with the Sightline Institute on how a carbon tax in Washington would work. Additionally, the Washington State Department of Commerce published a UW student's MPA thesis on the fiscal and environmental impacts of a carbon tax in Washington in 2011⁹.

Given these calls for and deliberations on a carbon tax in Washington State, the idea of instituting one must already be present in the mind of our legislators, and our lobbying efforts will simply push them in the right direction.

11. What creative and/or innovative tactics could we employ to engage the media and excite new students around this issue?

Seeing as the ESP is generally successful at exciting students around environmental issues, as they showed last year with the divestment campaign, we could trust them to do so over the carbon tax. As for mobilizing students around the issue of dedicated funding, we could use social media and posters to circulate data regarding how much students pay for education today compared to what our parents and legislators paid. We could also circulate data regarding how little funding universities receive now compared to what they used to receive.

It might be possible to get faculty and administration support on this issue and pursue joint lobby efforts/strategy. It would be powerful to have students and faculty side by side telling legislators how they are affected by the lack of funding. Faculty members often lack competitive pay or department resources are reduced, which impacts their ability to teach students to their fullest potential (increased class sizes limit teacher to student interaction.)

⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/opinion/a-carbon-tax-sensible-for-all.html?_r=0

⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLidyIR9t9Y>

⁹ <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Documents/Washington-State-Carbon-Tax.pdf>