

Rotary presenters agree on climate change, but politely debate whether I-732 is the answer

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By Pete DeLaunay



Information overload comes to mind when five climate change advocates come to the Rotary podium offering their perspectives on what's to come if carbon emissions are not dealt with – and dealt with decisively in the next 10-15 years. Thanks to our club's Sustainability Committee for pulling together a panel of presenters to talk about climate change and whether the financial side of Initiative 732 is prudent compared to having a carbon tax

dedicated to investments in clean energy.

According to the King County Voters guide *“This measure (Initiative 732) would impose a carbon emission tax on certain fossil fuels and fossil-fuel-generated electricity, reduce the sales tax by one percentage point and increase a low-income exemption, and reduce certain manufacturing taxes.”*

President Cathy introduced Emmy-Award winning KCTS commentator, Enrique Cerna, to moderate what became a spirited polite discussion not about the validity of climate change – all said it was coming – but whether the ‘carbon tax’ should be dedicated to clean energy development versus reducing current taxes.

The panelists: Brenna Davis, Washington Business Climate Action; Joe Casola, UW Climate Impacts Group; Chris Davis, Governor’s energy and carbon markets adviser; Yoram Bauman, Co-chair of Carbon Washington (pro-I-732) and Sarah Severn, Washington Businesses for Climate Action.



Brenna Davis began with an overview of the Paris Agreement -- an agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). She said it dealt with greenhouse gases emissions mitigation, adaptation and finance starting in the year 2020, and negotiated by representatives of 195 countries. She said “the goal is to reduce global warming by 2 degrees”.

Joe Casola Ph.D. described his work as Deputy Director of the UW Climate Impacts Group explores the implications of climate change, and progress toward a low carbon future. “We have a lot of resource management issues that need permanent solutions,” he said, “from ongoing management, monitoring and agile thinking.” Ms. Davis added that water availability during high heat days creates business risks associated with climate change.

The two presenters were then joined by the Governor’s energy adviser, Chris Davis; I-732 co-chair Yoram Bauman and Sarah Severn who opposes the initiative but not its intent.

“The Governor’s actions support the Paris climate aspirations to reduce global warming with implication of a 50-page ‘clean air rule’ to put a carbon cap program in place,” said Chris Davis Governor Inslee’s energy adviser, “with a three year timeline to demonstrate compliance.”

I-732 promoter Yoram Bauman said more than 320,000 signatures were gathered to get the initiative on the ballot, with more than 1,000 donors helping support the ‘grassroots’ effort. “The carbon tax is a moral and economic obligation to dedicate revenue to reduce the sales tax so that it makes sense across the spectrum,” he said. “A similar carbon tax in British Columbia is ‘revenue neutral’ and during eight years it has reduced emissions”. Initiative 732 would gradually increase the price of coal, oil, and natural gas, reducing sales tax and other taxes to lower emissions.

Sarah Severn offered somewhat passive opposition to I-732, supporting the idea of a carbon tax but not how the initiative would dedicate revenue to tax reductions as ‘revenue neutral’. “We believe in a revenue policy that meets carbon reduction goals by investing in sustainability practices”, she said. She contends the cost of clean technologies must be led by government research and development that takes a significant amount of funding. Funds that should flow from a carbon tax versus sales tax reductions or related low income exemptions.



Q&A was as diverse as the presentations. Excerpts ranged from the significance of an 8 degree temperature increase in our area and inward population migration, to the state’s climbing asthma rate and the implications of dry weather for wild fires coupled with higher rainfall related flooding.

President Cathy opened the meeting with **Corinne Cavanaugh’s** invocation followed



by **Lou Lunquist** for the anthem accompanied by **Freeman Fong** on the piano. New members **Lindsay Klarman** and **Nima Samiee** were introduced.

President Cathy closed the meeting by asking Rotarians to “take a deep breath” to understand climate change and how the decisions we make today will have long standing implications for the future.

