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MA should finance climate change projects abroad

Barrett bill would allow tax refunds to go to UN fund



BARBARA KATES-GARNICK,



PETER FOX-PENNER and



BENITO MULLER

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BY PROPOSING TO SLASH FEDERAL SPENDING to combat climate change, President Trump has declared war on our ability to deal with a very real, existential global problem that cannot be solved by building walls. As Washington abrogates its leadership both at home and abroad, states and cities must step up on both. Globally, the poorest and most vulnerable allies must be supported to enable them to combat climate change while reducing poverty, and the citizens of Massachusetts have an opportunity to step up to the plate.

Well before last November, US cities and states were playing a leading role in reducing carbon pollution and the superstorms and droughts caused by climate change. After a series of actions through which President Trump has greatly weakened America's international reputation, it is now clear that cities and states must do more, not least in counterbalancing the loss of federal funding pledged by the Obama administration to help developing countries.

US states have taken the lead in introducing economic tools to reduce their own carbon emissions. New York and California are both part of regional emission trading markets, while three states – including Massachusetts – are considering a carbon tax.

Such leadership in domestic action is essential. But if cities and states are to step up to national leadership, they must begin to think beyond their borders. The climate crisis must be solved through united worldwide efforts. For the poorest and most vulnerable nations, an essential part of the solution is gaining access to the funding required to cope with the disastrous floods, famines, and losses from climate change.

A state or city may understandably feel that it is doing its part by cutting its own emissions dramatically. Providing funds to someone halfway across the globe to build a flood-resilient agricultural system may seem like a role that cities or states aren't ready to assume. In America, as the saying goes, "all politics is local."

But different times and different challenges call for different thinking. The new leaders of American climate action at the state and local level must recognize that the (admittedly heroic) cuts in their own emissions don't fully address this global problem. Helping the least-developed countries to reduce emissions and protect themselves from climate impacts is an essential part of the solution. Without funding from the wealthier parts of the world, this simply will not happen. The climate crisis will not be solved, and the rising seas and storms will attack America's coastline, even if American cities themselves emit almost no greenhouse gases.

The good news is that a solution is within reach. As cities and states adopt trading markets for carbon emissions, renewable energy certificates, and many other clean energy financing mechanisms, they could easily dedicate a small (say 2 percent) share of these revenues to international efforts. The province of Quebec has already pledged \$5 million to the UN Least Developed Country Fund, which provides funding for climate projects in the 51 poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world, home to a total of 880 million people.

Here in Massachusetts, Sen. Michael Barrett has just introduced a bill that allows citizens to donate part of their state tax refund to the UN fund. Passing this bill will place the state in a position of global leadership on this crucial issue.

Mechanisms to fund such contributions must become an essential part of state and local climate policies. It has been said that if the Paris Conference made it chic for sub-nationals to provide multilateral support for climate change finance, now it must become de rigueur! With the new administration intent on crippling multilateralism in general and funding for international climate funds in particular, it is key that the leadership of states in the Trump era must extend to these now-depleted international channels for funding the poorest and most vulnerable countries struggling with climate change and poverty reduction.

Finally, neither citizens nor leaders should view this as merely an ethical (moral issue) problem. It is simply becoming part of the solution. As the United States found with the post-World War II Marshall Plan, international funding provides long-term economic and security dividends. In addition to the ethical dimensions of assisting those in need, healthy and resilient emerging economies will be better and safer allies and trading partners. They are the growth markets for the clean energy technologies that US cities and states will produce for the rest of the century. When solving multi-faceted problems of epic proportions, sometimes it is necessary to “think local but act global.”

Barbara Kates-Garnick is professor of practice at the Fletcher School at Tufts University and recently served as undersecretary of energy in the Patrick administration. Peter Fox-Penner is director of Boston University’s Institute for Sustainable Energy. Benito Müller is convener of international climate policy research for the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford.

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