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Healthy Climate Act advances to Joint Ways and Means Committee

SB 1574 to cut carbon emissions statewide, establish 'cap and invest' program

SALEM – Two key Oregon Senate Democrats are taking the lead on a bill to reduce carbon emissions and fund projects that promote a healthy environment, renewable energy development and transportation infrastructure across Oregon and its most disadvantaged communities.

Sen. Chris Edwards (D-Eugene) and Sen. Lee Beyer (D-Springfield) are spearheading efforts on Senate Bill 1574, the Healthy Climate Act, which advanced today to the Joint Ways and Means Committee out of the Oregon Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

“We know we are already behind if Oregon is to do its part in addressing climate change,” Edwards said. “So today we are working on the Healthy Climate Act, a bill that will ensure Oregon meets its carbon reduction goals by 2050.”

The Healthy Climate Act sets carbon emissions limits in three phases, lowering emissions to at least 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2025; 45 percent below 1990 levels by 2035; and 75 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

It also will establish a “cap and invest” program by creating a carbon pollution market, to be operational Jan. 1, 2020. The program will determine which emitters will be regulated under the program and will establish a marketplace for purchase and sale of carbon allowances. Over time, the state will reduce the number of allowances issued, which in turn will reduce the amount of carbon emitted statewide.

“Climate change is the most pressing issue facing mankind,” Beyer said. “Anyone who has considered the droughts and extreme weather events experienced worldwide recently should have trouble questioning the majority of scientists predicting a dire future for our children and grandchildren if we don’t act responsibly. The Healthy Climate Act puts Oregon on track to do its share.”

Funding generated through the market will provide utility bill assistance for low-income residential customers and energy intensive industrial customers. The Healthy Climate Act also establishes the Climate Investments Account in the State Highway Fund for transportation infrastructure projects, with priority given to those that reduce emissions. Forty percent of the funds are designated for transportation projects that are in or for the benefit of disadvantaged communities. The program also funds carbon reduction and climate change adaptation grants for projects such as water storage, irrigation, wildfire prevention and other projects that benefit both urban and rural communities.

“The Healthy Climate Act is innovative because it brings together carbon reduction and funding for critical infrastructure and transportation projects in a thoughtful and inclusive planning process, which will be up for Legislative review in 2019,” Edwards said. “For those of us who believe we have an obligation to do our part, this bill represents a tremendous opportunity to both put us on a path to reducing our carbon emissions and providing the resources necessary to help communities adapt to climate change.”

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