

To love God and neighbor, put a price on carbon pollution

By Katy Z. Allen and Margaret Bullitt-Jonas/Guest Columnists

Posted Oct 22, 2017 at 4:48 PM

As summer drew to a close, the hearts of Americans were with the millions of people in Texas and Louisiana who were pummeled by Hurricane Harvey, an unprecedented deluge that in one part of Southeast Texas dropped more than 4 feet of water, setting a rainfall record for the continental U.S.

Less than two weeks later, Hurricane Irma was tearing through the Caribbean and up through Florida, displacing millions, causing billions of dollars in property damage, and marking the first time that two Category 4 Atlantic storms made U.S. landfall in the same year.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, torrential rains fell in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, as Southeast Asia endured a record-breaking monsoon season that caused over 1,200 deaths. Then, following Hurricane Jose, along came the massive Hurricane Maria, which devastated Puerto Rico and created a humanitarian crisis. Today, wildfires are tearing through Northern California, accelerated by high winds, extreme heat, and bone-dry landscapes.

Climate change didn't cause these monster storms and fires, but it certainly made them worse. These so-called "natural" disasters are not entirely natural – they are driven by carbon pollution. Dirty energy like coal, gas, and oil is dumping carbon and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, destabilizing the climate and leading to extreme weather events.

As people of faith, we believe that the Earth and its web of life are precious in God's sight (Genesis 1-2:3). Our Judeo-Christian heritage teaches that the Earth belongs not to

us but to God (Psalm 24), and that we are entrusted with loving the Earth as God loves it (Genesis 2:15). The climate crisis presents people of faith and good will with a deeply moral question: Will we be faithful stewards of the world entrusted to our care, or will we stand idly by and watch as carbon pollution takes down cities, uproots millions of people, ravages the poor, and destroys life as it has evolved on this planet?

We are long past the stage of trying to fix climate change by swapping out a few light bulbs. We need comprehensive legislation that puts a price on carbon and shifts the market away from dirty energy. We are thrilled that two carbon-pricing bills are being considered in the Massachusetts State House. Both bills put a fee on fossil fuels as they enter the state, and rebate some or all of the money to households and businesses.

Senate Bill S.1821, introduced by Senator Michael Barrett, rebates 100 percent of the revenue. House Bill H.1726, from Representative Jen Benson, rebates 80 percent of the revenue and reinvests the remaining 20 percent into a Green Infrastructure Fund for clean energy, public transit, and climate adaptation projects.

Both these bills deserve strong support. For starters, they will reduce emissions of dirty greenhouse gases. Thanks to a higher price on carbon, households and business will turn to low and no-carbon options. What's more, the two bills also protect the interests of low-income, moderate-income, and rural populations, who on average will receive more money from the rebate than they pay in higher fuel costs. Indeed, House Bill H. 1726 commits at least one-third of funding generated through Green Fund to low-income communities, and also sets aside funding for energy efficiency programs for people who rent.

Finally, these two bills will boost the economy and protect businesses, rebating money to businesses based on their number of employees. The Senate bill will create much-needed jobs in Massachusetts, especially in the transportation, resiliency, and clean energy sectors.

Our religious teachings affirm that our deepest responsibility as human beings is to love God and our neighbor. They also demand that we shoulder our human responsibility to care for planet Earth and to create a more just, peaceful, and life-sustaining society. Putting a price on carbon and supporting S. 1821 and H. 1726 is a powerful and faithful response to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

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