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48 Members of the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representative Urge Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy to Release Carbon Pricing Legislation

Boston, Mass. (March X, 2016) – 48 members of the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives are urging the chairs of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy (TUE) to release with a favorable recommendation S. 1747, legislation that would implement carbon pricing in the Commonwealth. The legislators sent a letter on March 8th to the committee chairs, State Senator Benjamin Downing (D-Pittsfield) and State Representative Thomas Golden (D-Lowell), urging action on the bills.

“We believe that fossil fuels, the primary drivers of climate change, should be priced to reflect the health and environmental problems they cause,” the legislators wrote in the letter. “Putting a fee on CO₂ is the single most effective step a government can take to fight global warming. Here in Massachusetts, doing so would reduce our fossil fuel dependence, accelerate the shift to greater use of renewable energy, and incentivize us to increase energy efficiency.”

Two current proposals at the State House would create a common sense carbon pricing system in Massachusetts, similar to the one that has worked well in British Columbia. One bill, S. 1747, would charge fossil fuel importers a fee based on the carbon content of the fuels. The revenues would go into a special fund for rebates to be sent directly to households and employers, in order to minimize any increased costs in living and doing business that result from fuel importers passing on the fees. Each resident would receive an equal rebate from the fund, giving everyone an incentive to reduce their use of fossil fuel in order to keep more of their rebates. Since low- and moderate-income households tend to use less energy than wealthier ones, most would come out ahead, according to a study done for the Commonwealth’s Department of Energy Resources (DOER). Businesses, nonprofit organizations, and municipalities would receive a dividend from the fund based on their share of the state’s employment, and most industries and economic sectors also would come out slightly ahead.

Another developing proposal – S. 1786 - follows a similar model but would invest a small portion of the funds in the clean energy sector. In both cases, Massachusetts would be implementing a policy that encourages residents and businesses to use less fossil fuel, thus reducing carbon emissions while building a more solid energy foundation for the economy. The letter asks the TUE committee chairs to attach S. 1786 to S. 1747.

The legislators who signed the letter include State Senators and Representatives from across the Commonwealth. State representatives from Berkshire, Bristol, Essex, Hampden, Hampshire, Middlesex, Norfolk, Plymouth, and Suffolk counties all signed onto the letter.

In October, members of the Massachusetts Campaign for a Clean Energy Future – including business leaders, clean energy investors, former public officials, members of the clergy, and high school students - came out to support carbon pricing at a TUE hearing held at the State House. In addition, more than 100 businesses across the Commonwealth have expressed support for implementing carbon pricing in Massachusetts.

In a 2014 study commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER), the nonpartisan consulting firm Regional Economic Models Inc., estimated that a carbon fee and rebate policy could produce thousands of jobs across the Commonwealth. The DOER study also found that by 2035, this policy could reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to 20 percent below the 1990 level, a substantial improvement from the current 11 percent.

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