

I am writing on behalf of People for Climate Action - Seattle (PCA-S), a grassroots organization with 180 members, whose mission is to help the City of Seattle develop and implement a plan that will eliminate greenhouse gas emissions.

In order to meet the City's adopted climate goals, oil and gas furnaces must be replaced with electric heat pumps in thousands of homes each year. The use of fossil fuels for heating and other building-related use accounted for more than one-third of Seattle's greenhouse gas emissions in 2016. Unless the use of fossil fuels in new and existing buildings is addressed directly, it will not be possible for Seattle to meet its commitment under the 2019 Green New Deal resolution to eliminate carbon pollution by 2030.

We are gratified the City Council is -- at long last -- considering strong action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from home energy use. The payroll tax spending plan proposed by Councilmembers Tammy Morales and Kshama Sawant would provide resources on the scale required to meet this huge challenge. Because Seattle City Light is prohibited from using electricity sale revenues to convert users from fossil fuels to electricity, this must be done using direct tax funding.

PCA-S supports the overall concept and the spending plan for the proposed payroll tax. We support enactment of a progressive tax that addresses three urgent needs facing Seattle: economic hardship caused by COVID-19, the shamefully unaddressed crisis of homelessness, and impending climate catastrophe. A new tax would also address the need for a stable and progressive source of revenue.

While PCA-S supports the broad goals of the proposed payroll tax, it neither endorses nor opposes the specific legislation. We urge City Councilmembers and the Mayor to work together to agree on the details of a progressive tax that addresses these simultaneous crises.

One-quarter of the revenue collected by the 1.3 percent payroll tax in 2021 and beyond would be spent on greenhouse gas reductions, through building electrification, solar installations, weatherization, and training programs for workers in these important ventures.

It will be important for these funds to be spent with an eye to maximizing the cost-effectiveness of each project in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We urge careful planning of these programs to ensure the funds are well-spent and achieve the equitable distribution we all desire. We look forward to participating in the discussion on the implementation of strategies to combat greenhouse gas emissions.