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EarthBeat



by Catholic News Service

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The five Catholic bishops of Washington state have offered voters a "framework" by which to consider a Nov. 6 ballot initiative that would, among other measures, put a price on carbon emissions.

Citing the teaching of the popes of the last half-century — from Blessed Paul VI through Pope Francis — the bishops said in an Oct. 4 statement that their concern focused on the impact of climate change on the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

Titled "Catholic Principles and Environmental Policy," the statement was released on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of the environment.

The bishops stated they remained neutral on Initiative 1631 as Washingtonians prepared to vote.

The measure, also known as the Clean Air Clean Energy Initiative, was developed as an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by requiring the state to invest in clean air and water and clean energy, support forests and "healthy communities." It would impose a fee on large carbon emitters based on the amount of pollution they release.

The bishops offered several points for voters to consider before going to the polls.

They urged people to weigh how any effort to impact climate change "should respect human life and dignity, especially that of the poorest and most vulnerable among us."

Along with human dignity, they said, "local communities, especially low-income residents whose voice is not often heard, should have a voice in shaping the efforts to reduce carbon emissions."

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Finally, the bishops called for "workers to be supported in dealing with the negative effects on the workforce resulting from a shift away from fossil fuels by receiving assistance to mitigate impacts on their livelihoods and families."

Noting that the initiative would significantly affect Washington state, the bishops said that applying Catholic teaching to the ballot measure "is not a cut and dried exercise and calls for prayerful consideration."

"We believe that wise action to address climate change is necessary to protect the common good for present and future generations. Beyond the initiative, we urge every person in Washington state to seek effective ways in our personal lives, and in our businesses and industries to promote the common good and care for God's creation," the statement concluded.

Signing the statement were Archbishop Peter Sartain and Auxiliary Bishops Eusebio Elizondo and Daniel Mueggenborg of Seattle, Bishop Thomas Daly of Spokane, and Bishop Joseph Tyson of Yakima.

The Washington initiative is among the latest being undertaken by individual states to reduce carbon pollution as the Environmental Protection Agency has introduced plans to roll back regulations on industry, citing the high cost of implementing some measures and executive branch overreach during Barack Obama's administration.