

Establish carbon tax on fossil fuels

BY [JUDY WEISS](#) | SPECIAL TO THE DAILY CAL

Sophie Mattson [wrote](#) about a Berkeley proposal to require climate change warning labels on gas pumps. It reminded me of a 1983 New York City law requiring establishments selling alcohol to post signs warning pregnant women that drinking alcohol while pregnant can cause birth defects. Alcohol industries worried the signs would hurt sales. Some organizations objected the signs weren't required on every bottle, and feminist organizations complained the law discriminated against women. Similarly, today, oil and gas organizations worry about sales and why signs will only be required at gas stations but not also on other sources of greenhouse gas emissions, such as home stoves and furnaces.

Eventually, the alcohol industry stopped fighting congressional efforts to put labels on every bottle because they saw that labels limited their liability for birth defects. Also, alcohol warning signs only limit drinking for women of childbearing age — and only when they are pregnant. It isn't the end of drinking by women, nor does it impact men's drinking. The alcohol industry was bound to cave. Who would want to argue against educating the public about fetal alcohol syndrome?

But the fossil fuel industry is facing an eventual phase-out of most products. Demand will remain for small amounts of petroleum products used in manufacturing, but most fossil fuels will remain in the ground.

No wonder they have waged a climate change misinformation campaign for decades. Importantly, the main message of the nozzle signs isn't that fossil fuels are evil. The message is a reminder that our actions contribute to climate change.

We could go through an arduous process of putting climate change signs on everything — airplane tickets, home bills for oil and gas, or utility bills for electricity from power plants burning coal, oil or gas — in order to educate the public. But there is a simpler way to teach. Put a carbon tax on fossil fuels. The tax will increase costs of activities or products harmful to the climate. Consumers will learn

from relative prices how to substitute fuels, foods or methods of transportation that are cheaper and therefore less polluting.

Low- and middle-income families can be shielded from price increases through rebating the tax to households. Rebate the tax? The point of the tax is not to be a hardship, it is to be a signal helping decisions. Rebating the tax boosts the economy and creates jobs.

Please ask Rep. Barbara Lee to review a recent Regional Economic Models Inc. study of the effects of a rebated carbon tax.

Rabbi Judy Weiss is a volunteer member of Citizens' Climate Lobby.

<http://www.dailyca.org/2014/06/23/establish-carbon-tax-fossil-fuels/>