Legislative Session Scorecard: Climate Funding Includes Important Investments in Environmental Justice, But Opportunities Remain Unfulfilled

March 23, 2023 - Today, the Washington State Senate released its 2023-25 Biennium Operating Budget Proposal, following their Capital Budget, and despite claims by lawmakers and a mandate from the Climate Commitment Act (CCA), proposed investments in communities most overburdened by pollution fall short.

Under the CCA, at least 35% of the revenues generated in carbon market auctions must fund “direct and meaningful benefits” to communities overburdened by pollution and climate change, and an additional 10% must be formally supported by a tribe. Yet today’s budget bills tell a different story:

- Of the $319 million in the Senate Capital Budget from Climate Commitment Act investments, only 5% is explicitly dedicated to benefiting non-tribal overburdened communities.
- Of the $679 million in the Senate Operating Budget from Climate Commitment Act investments, only 15% is explicitly to benefiting non-tribal overburdened communities.

The Senate Budget does have some exciting proposals aligned with frontline communities’ needs, including $10 million to support workers most impacted by climate change, $38 million toward community participatory budgeting, funding for energy assistance programs, and continued funding for the Health Environment for All (HEAL) Act. However, the Senate needs to make their commitments and their investment in overburdened communities more clear.

For example, California spent 48% of their climate funds on benefiting frontline communities, with large investments in public transit, green affordable housing, and community air protections. Our Senate may be depending on the transportation budget to fill the gap, but communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis deserve for each budget to make equitable investments in climate justice.

“Communities overburdened by pollution have been promised investments as a result of the Climate Commitment Act, but the Senate’s initial proposal has our frontline
communities asking: where did those commitments go?" said Deric Gruen, Co-
executive Director of Programs and Policy at Front and Centered.

“Our state recently sold millions of carbon allowances totaling around $300 million. 
Meaningful investments from this revenue must be directed toward the expressed 
needs of communities who are historically and disproportionately impacted by 
pollution, and who stand to lose the most from a program that incentivizes but 
doesn’t guarantee that they’ll see reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.”

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