Written by **James Murphy** on December 30, 2023

Washington State Economist Alleges Harassment for Refusal to Lie About Cap-and-trade Costs

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A former economist for the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has accused state officials of reprisals after he refused to lie about the financial impacts of the state's new cap-and-trade program. Scott Smith has filed a whistleblower complaint claiming he was retaliated against by the State for not fudging the true cost of the cap-and-trade scheme on gas prices as Governor Jay Inslee was publicly accusing the fossil fuel industry of lying about the cost of the program.

Smith has worked for WSDOT for the past five years, forecasting fuel consumption, pricing, and revenues from gas taxes and fees. The 64-year-old has been a public-service economist for 35 years, and claims his career was ruined when he predicted that the impact of cap-and-trade would be an increase of 45-50 cents per gallon of gas purchased.

"I tried to do the right thing, and they eliminated my job," Smith said. "I didn't want to quit. I'm an economist. That's the way I think. I've been damaged. I'm 64 years old. I've got nowhere to go. They left me no other choice."

Cap-and-trade is a provision of the state's Climate Commitment Act, which was passed in 2021. State leaders assured the citizens of the state that it would have little effect on gasoline prices.

"I don't think it's going to be noticeable," Joel Creswell of the state's Department of Ecology said.

"All in all, over time, we don't think we're going to see a big impact on prices at the pump, on customer prices," said Luke Martland, implementation manager for the Ecology Department.

Smith claims he was pressured to not include the cap-and-trade surcharges by supervisors at WSDOT, notably Amber Coulson, WSDOT's financial and planning manager, and Erik Hansen of the Governor's Office of Financial Management.

"The fact that carbon taxes raise the cost of gasoline is a matter of 6th grade math. The incidence (who the cost ultimately falls on) is usually assumed to be 100 percent on the consumer," Smith said in his whistleblower complaint. "This is the logic employed by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Further, S&P displays a line-item cost per gallon in their Oil Price Information Report, a summary of wholesale fuel prices by location."

In a series of emails he sent to himself to document the situation, Smith detailed the pressure he was

under from supervisors.

An email from January 18 stated: "At 10:30 today (my temporary supervisor) called me and instructed me…not to write any emails about cap and trade because of a potential public records request. I was also instructed tentatively not to include any cap and trade adjustments in my gasoline price estimate."

In a follow-up email, Smith wrote that his superiors "also informed me on the 18th that Amber (a WSDOT manager) would 'prefer' no adjustments for Climate Commitment Act surcharges. I informed (the supervisor) that under no circumstances would I 'jimmy' the numbers. He agreed that would be inappropriate."

Yet, the pressure to not include Smith's cap-and-trade predictions continued, as on January 24, the same supervisor allegedly "tried to restate his instructions about the price estimate. He stated that 'We would prefer if you would keep your assumptions (on gas prices) unchanged from November.'"

"I was a bit horrified; I was aghast. I've never had anyone tell me to jimmy the numbers, to come up with some artificial number, never," Smith said. "I wouldn't do it. It just wasn't right."

Smith remained unmoved and refused to bend to the will of his supervisors. After enduring months of petty retribution from government officials, including the denial of a promotion, refusals to approve leave and remote work, and an attempt to back-date and change his job performance evaluation, Smith finally chose to resign.

The same day he resigned, Smith filed a whistleblower complaint with the assistance of the Citizens Action Defense Fund (CADF), a Washington State watchdog group that looks after the constitutional rights of Washington citizens. Smith is seeking damages in the amount of $750,000.

"[Smith] was forced out of state service for one reason: he refused to lie about the tremendous impact that cap-and-trade was having on fuel prices and 'jimmy the numbers' to support the Governor's narrative," said CADF attorney and Executive Director Jackson Maynard. "My client showed tremendous courage and integrity, and for that, he was shown the door. He lost years of wages, potential for retirement savings, and his good name was sullied."

Kris Abrudan, WSDOT communications director, assured the public that Mr. Smith's complaint would be seriously investigated.

"The Washington State Department of Transportation takes whistleblower allegations very seriously and what our agency can say is limited as this is both an investigation and legal matter," Abrudan stated in an email.

One of the climate cult's most valuable tools is the ability to tell baldfaced lies. Unfortunately for Mr. Smith, he lacked the ability to do so — even when ordered to by superiors. For that reason, the leftist government of Washington State needed him to go away so that they could continue to withhold key information about their climate policies from the public.

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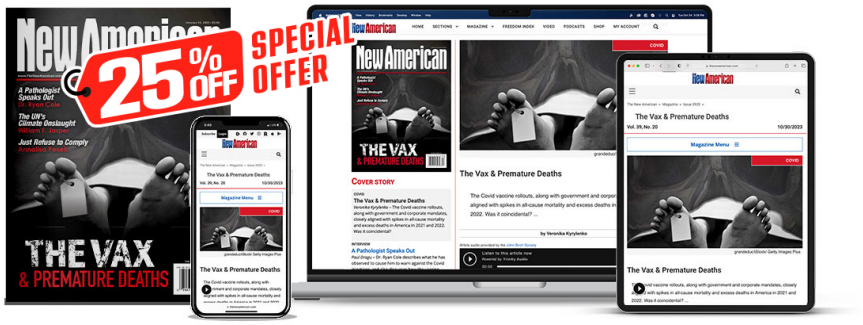

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