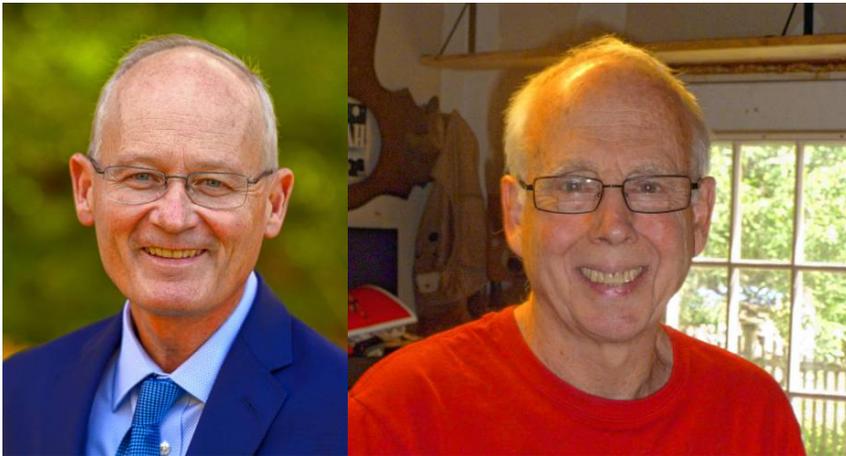


# GREENFIELD RECORDER

## My Turn: Reducing household energy costs is good for our pockets and the planet



By GEORGE BUTLER and MARK REYNOLDS

Published: 1/18/2022 2:44:55 PM

Modified: 1/18/2022 2:43:51 PM

The news that volatile global oil and gas markets will increase household energy costs is frustrating for hard-working folks in Massachusetts.

Fortunately here in Conway, as in many local towns, we have negotiated community wide electric rates saving residents money while shrinking our carbon footprint. Massachusetts was one of the first states in the nation to pursue municipal aggregation.

Thankfully, there are small but impactful changes households can make to save more as we prepare for higher bills during these colder months.

Here in Massachusetts, *MASS SAVE* provides free home energy assessments for customers to help reduce energy use and provides rebates for many residential energy equipment installations. The federal resource [energy.gov](https://www.energy.gov) also has guidance for carrying out a do-it-yourself home energy assessment.

More dollars could be saved by turning off lights around the house and upgrading to energy-efficient light bulbs. Likewise, reducing water use, taking shorter showers, and opting for cold water laundry cycles can help.

As pump prices rise, we can make gas go further by walking or cycling when possible, running multiple errands in one trip, and keeping vehicles well maintained with properly inflated tires. Just driving smoothly, within the speed limit, and anticipating stops can improve fuel efficiency.

While making any of these changes will allow consumers to cut costs in the short term, everyday Americans still remain beholden to the ups and downs of a complicated global oil and gas market.

The pandemic has highlighted how supply and demand, and the interests of international oil producers, can influence the bills that arrive in our mailboxes and the prices we see at the pump. A volatile global market for fossil fuels leads to uncertainty as prices fluctuate. Additionally, there's a more permanent cost — that of increasing climate disruptions caused by burning fossil fuels. In a vicious circle, a fossil fuel-exacerbated climate crisis is adding to the reliability issues we see today.

Every fraction of a degree we add to global warming by burning fossil fuels amplifies the threat of wildfires, heat waves, flooding, polar vortexes, and hurricanes. In turn, such extremes can cause costly infrastructure and transportation issues and leave electricity grids struggling. In February 2021, an unexpected winter storm left Texas just minutes away from grid collapse. Although the worst was averted, frigid temperatures led to massive power outages, dozens of deaths, water shortages, and agricultural losses exceeding \$600 million.

There is scientific consensus that we must act quickly to slow the global warming disrupting our lives. America already leads the world with innovation. Studies and real-world examples show that through technology we can have a clean, affordable and reliable electricity grid.

Efforts to increase the clean energy we produce at home will spare American households from the turbulence of a global fossil fuel market. And with clean energy destined to become cheaper and more popular, alongside a growing market for electric vehicles, the demand for fossil fuels will lessen and adjust over time, helping to slash the prices of carbon-intensive sources of energy along the way.

So how do we fast-track this process to relieve Americans of unexpected financial burdens inherent in the volatile oil and gas markets?

Right now, even with much of the Build Back Better bill stalled, the Senate is discussing enacting a corporate polluter fee as part of the budget reconciliation process to jumpstart economy-wide action to lower emissions.

The money from this fee could be returned as a monthly “carbon cash back” check to American households providing cash to spend as they choose — an invaluable windfall as we continue to lose out to fluctuating prices caused by international oil corporations.

As the Senate struggles to secure our energy future with meaningful climate legislation as part of the Build Back Better bill or a separate climate bill, we urge Sens. Markey and Warren to include a price on carbon with a dividend returned directly to the households who will weather future energy crunches.

As our country makes the vital transition to cheaper, reliable, greener energy to secure a livable world, we deserve a little more cash in our pockets too.

*George Butler is a resident of Conway and volunteer with the Ashfield chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby. Mark Reynolds is executive director of Citizens' Climate Lobby.*