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EDITORIAL

A Habit to Break

Published: October 25, 2009

A year ago, New York State joined nine other Eastern states from Maryland to Maine in an innovative program to control greenhouse gases by charging power plants a fee to emit carbon dioxide. Nine of the 10 agreed to use the proceeds exclusively for renewable energy, advanced technologies and other programs to address the challenge of global warming. New York did not, and it now seems likely that almost none of the money Albany has collected will be used for the envisioned cutting-edge research and development.

The State Legislature voted several months ago to devote a little over half the fund — \$112 million — to retrofitting homes, collecting energy data and other “green jobs” programs. These are worthy objectives, but New York already has a number of programs that try to increase energy efficiency through existing technologies. The point of the fund was to jump-start new and emerging technologies, for which there is very little money.

Now Gov. David Paterson has announced that he plans to take what is left in the fund, about \$90 million, and use it to help close the state’s yawning budget deficit. The governor is desperate for money: programs large and small are being slashed — including health care and education — and it can be fairly argued that nothing should be off-limits. That said, we strongly hope that the other states hold the line. We also urge Mr. Paterson not to make this a habit.

To cover previous budget shortfalls, New York’s governors, from both parties, have repeatedly raided an older program called the Environmental Protection Fund — aimed, among other things, at conserving open space. The result, time and again, is that short-term gains in the state’s balance sheet translate into long-term losses for the environment.

A version of this article appeared in print on October 26, 2009, on page A22 of the New York edition.

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