

OUR VIEW

Legislature short session needs overhaul

Republican lawmakers remain on the lam as the last day for the legislative short session draws near to prevent Democrats from having a quorum so they can pass sweeping regulations on Oregon’s carbon emissions.

That’s not how Oregonians want their Legislature to function. Politics might be the only profession where taking off can lead to political victory or at least a stalemate, but no one likes it.

Senate Republican Leader Herman Baertschiger, Republican from Grants Pass, late last week sent a letter urging Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, to “focus on budget adjustments and policy fixes,” the original intent of the short session, rather than pushing through big and controversial bills.

Oregonians in 2010 approved Ballot Measure 71 to amend the state’s Constitution to establish annual sessions. The outcome wasn’t even close. Voters supported the measure about 68% to 32%. The new law went into effect in 2011, setting up the regular or long session at 160 calendar days in odd-numbered years and limiting the session in even-numbered years to 35 days.

The short session also comes with some limiting criteria. House members can introduce no more than two bills, and state senators get one each. Interim committees can propose no more than five bills. The executive branch can present no more than five bills at the request of the governor. The same goes for the judicial branch at the request of the Oregon chief justice.

Those limits made sense then and still do. A month and some days does not allow much time to get through thousands of bills the regular session handles. There’s scant time to hold hearings and take input from experts and from the citizens laws could affect.

And Baertschiger is right about what persuaded voters to approve annual sessions. They wanted lawmakers to deal with budget fixes or tweak laws that had unintended consequences sooner rather than every two years or when the governor called a special session. But now in year eight, the experiment has been uneven. Lawmakers — primarily Democrats — have used the short session to introduce sweeping legislation.

They tried in 2018 to push cap and trade. The complex legislation did not gain much traction. That led to the conflict in the 2019 regular session when Republican senators took off to block passage. And it set up the showdown that’s going on now, which has escalated to the point of House Democrats issuing subpoenas to compel their Republican colleagues to return to the Capitol.

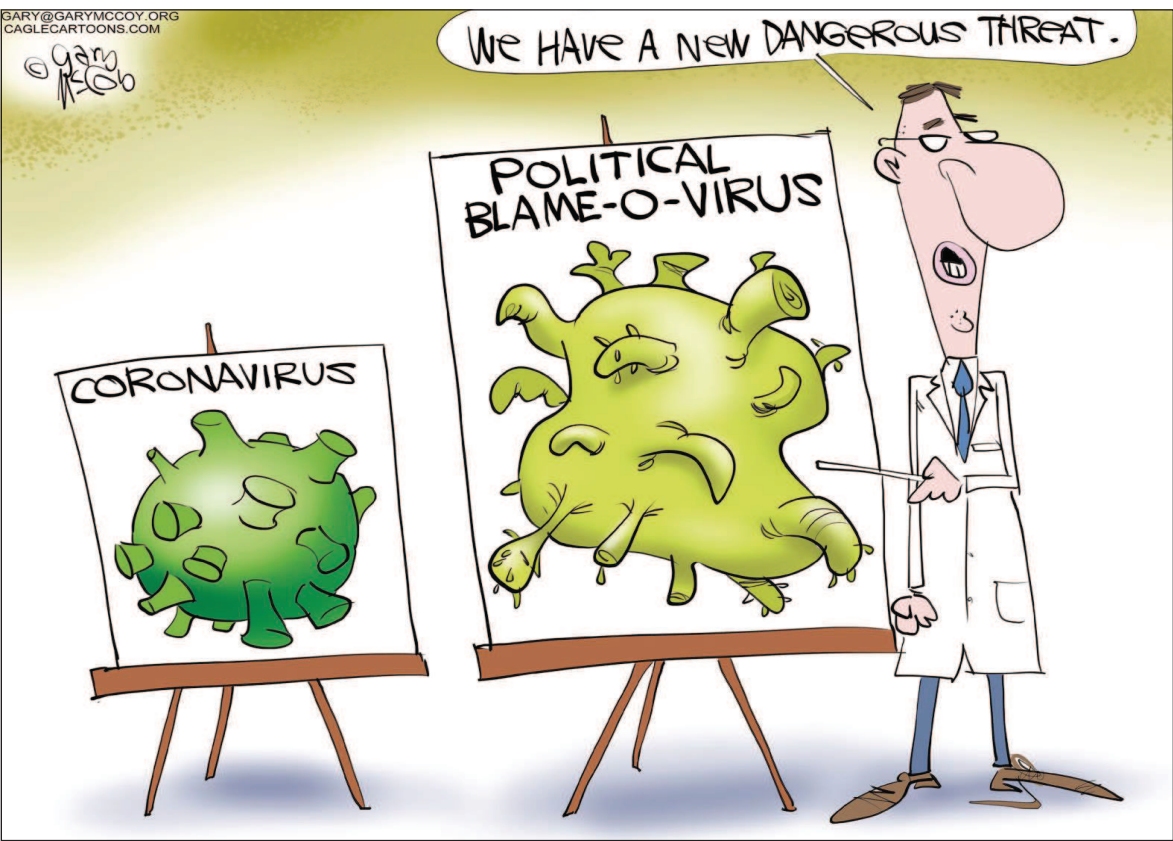
Legislators in the two chambers could avoid this with rules specific to the short session requiring bills have bipartisan support or bipartisan sponsors before they get any hearing. Even committee bills could have that requirements, the same for what comes down from the governor’s office or the judiciary.

The House and Senate would have to adopt their own sets of rules for this end, but it could help ensure controversial legislation or bills that require a lot of examination and fact-gathering don’t make it very far. It also would avoid walkouts that dam up the entire legislative process and put other meaningful and vital legislation in jeopardy. And having bipartisan support, of course, would not guarantee any bill’s ultimate passage.

The two chambers could even create an end-around: As long as two-thirds of the House and Senate agree, they could dig into something like cap and trade. They already have a similar rule that allows for a five-day extension of the short session.

Of course, passing these kinds of rules would require Democrat support. And they should support it. The Democrats right now look like the stereotype so much of rural Oregon sees them as: political know-it-alls who want to dictate to Oregonians what is best for them.

That’s the very attitude that widens Oregon’s urban-rural divide rather than helps to close it.



MY VOICE

All we want are the facts

Because my family didn’t have television on the farm, for most of my growing up years, it was a special treat to watch TV when I would stay with my grandparents in Walla Walla during the summer. One of my favorite shows was “Dragnet”. Sargent Joe Friday, played by, Jack Webb was the star. The best-known quote from the TV series was “All we want are the facts, ma’am.”

Later, comedian Dan Aykroyd shortened it to, “Just the facts, ma’am. Just the facts.”

The Oregon Legislature is dealing with a massive bill called cap and trade. What are the facts? Can you get the facts without the political spin? KGW News in Portland reported some facts, which I believe have been lost or ignored in the cap and trade discussion. Here are few facts you might find interesting.

Fact No. 1 — Being opposed to the current cap-and-trade bills does not mean you are a “climate change denier.” I and my fellow Republicans have been willing to work on bipartisan bills to address the issue. But at every turn we have been rejected. It is this bill or nothing.

Fact No. 2 — Do the math. The cap-and-trade legislation, before it is done, is estimated to accrue billions of dollars in increased energy costs, with no measurable reduction in greenhouse gasses. Oregon’s produces 65 million metric tons of greenhouse gases per year. The United States produces 6.4 billion metric tons for its annual carbon footprint. Do the math, and Oregon’s contribution is 1%. The entire world’s carbon footprint is 36.8 billion metric tons. Oregon’s part of that is 1/10 of 1%.

Even the proponents of this piece of legislation say Oregon’s contribution to world greenhouse gas emissions is unmeasurable. We are asking Oregon businesses and Oregon citizens to fall on their swords for no measurable result.

“Do the math, ma’am. Do the math.”

Fact No. 3 — Oregon has already passed significant legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: low

About the author



State Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena is a Republican and in his eighth year serving Senate District 29, which comprises part of Wasco County and all of Gilliam, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Union, and Wallowa counties. Before that, he served as Umatilla County commissioner for 30 years. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande 97850, or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

carbon fuel standard legislation; coal-to-clean legislation; Renewable Energy Portfolio legislation; \$2 billion upgrading efficiency through Energy Trust of Oregon, which Oregon rate payers have funded.

“Do the math, ma’am. Do the math.”

Fact No. 4 — Oregon’s population grew from 2.8 million in 1990 to 4.2 million today. Over that same period of time, our emissions grew from 56.2 to 64 million metric tons. We experienced a 50% growth in population with only a 15% growth in emissions. Oregon actually has experienced a 22% reduction per capita since 1990 in greenhouse emissions. I believe the facts show that what we have done legislatively is working, and the citizens are already heavily investing in the reduction.

“Do the math, ma’am. Do the math.”

Fact No. 5 — Oregonians are an intelligent lot. To state the cap-and-trade legislation is too complicated for citizens to understand, as my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have done, is insulting. The people of Oregon are intelligent enough to determine for themselves if the proposed cap-and-trade legislation contains the facts they require to cast an affirmative vote.

What is the reason the Democratic majority rejects having the people decide? Could it be the facts aren’t there to support the vote? I certainly think that is the reason.

“All we want are the facts, ma’am.”

Fact No. 6 — The Republican legislators have been trying to get the facts. We have time and time again throughout the process asked questions to try to get the facts.

Question: What are the actual costs of this program? Answer: We don’t have the time or resources to determine it.

Question: Is it a tax? Answer: Don’t think so, but let the courts decide.

Question: Will Oregon businesses have to leave Oregon? Answer: We hope not.

Question: With no measurable impact on either the world’s or the United States’ carbon imprint, why should Oregonians and Oregon companies be required to pay such a massive cost? Answer: We have a moral obligation, and if Oregon leads other states will follow.

“How do you get the facts, ma’am, when there aren’t any to be given?”

In a court of law, both sides present the facts as they see them. Our state Constitution also provides the same format with legislation, where the facts can be presented and debated in the court of public opinion. The citizens of Oregon become the jury that decides the outcome. The cap-and-trade legislation needs to be decided by a vote of the people of Oregon.

To do anything else is wrong. Let the people decide, ma’am, let the people decide.

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