

OUR VIEW

Session left transparency in the dust

The Democrats botched the legislative short session. They can blame Republicans until they are blue in the face — pun intended — but the supermajority party knew the possible consequences of pushing controversial climate change legislation in a mere 35-day session. The Democrats in the least should have slow walked cap and trade, holding it for the end of the session. They should have first worked with Republicans on simpler bills and bills that would fix immediate needs, from funding to fight forest fires to helping Eastern Oregonians recover from flooding.

That might have gone some distance toward making the session productive and may have avoided the need for a special session or Gov. Kate Brown sidestepping the Legislature with an executive order to enact cap and trade.

The Dems maintain Republicans were unwilling to compromise on the climate legislation, and that's true. The Republicans would only be on the floor for a vote if the bill's language referred it to a vote of the people.

The Democrats were just as unwilling to compromise, refusing to allow Oregonians to vote on a measure that would have wide and lasting effects. They acted more like bullies than lawmakers.

And in this morass, a crucial move to strengthen transparency in Oregon government remains in the piles of bills that went nowhere.

Senate Bill 1506 would establish the position of the public records advocate as independent from the governor's office. Democrats and Republicans supported the bill.

The bill was a response to the September 2019 resignation of Ginger McCall, Oregon's first public records advocate.

McCall contended Brown's staff pressured her to represent the interest of the governor while staying silent about that. McCall — rightly — wanted nothing to do with the two-faced approach and left the job.

The Public Records Advisory Council also did not like the governor's office having influence over the person working to ensure the public has access to public records. SB 1506 would allow the council to appoint McCall's successors rather than the governor. The bill also provides the advocate with the authority to weigh in on legislation.

That's significant. Oregon has more than 500 exemptions to public records — some peg the number at 550 or more. Those exemptions come from lawmakers and special interests.

The public records advocate, then, could head off the creation of more loopholes or at least voice opposition to them.

The advocate position has two other important purposes: resolve conflicts arising from public records requests and train public employees and others on Oregon's public records laws.

The ream of exemptions presents challenges to record seekers and record providers. What might appear to be a simple request could require a public body check with a lawyer to make sure there are no exemptions. McCall's training on public records, therefore, was of real benefit to the people of Oregon.

And the people would benefit further if the governor's office — no matter who served there — could not control the advocate.

Given the failure of the short session, a special session seems likely. If that comes to be, Democrats and Republicans should take up SB 1506 as soon as possible and pass it. That kind of bipartisanship would be a small step toward reconciliation and a better functioning Legislature.

And it would show the two sides are putting Oregonians first.

CDC GUIDELINES ON SAFELY ENJOYING THE OREGON WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM'S RUN IN THE PAC-12 TOURNAMENT...

- DO:**
- Remain calm (despite historic season)
 - Sanitize T.V. remote regularly
 - Turn head 90° clockwise during chest bumps →
- DON'T:**
- High Five
 - Hoard the snacks
 - Share over-sized Foam Fingers



MY VOICE

Cap-and-trade bill about power, money

The EPA report from 1990-2018 on U.S. emissions shows an overall increase of 3.7%, but since 2005, emissions declined by 12.3%. Oregon fares well because our vast agricultural and forest land need carbon dioxide. We also have passed more than 54 state laws related to environmental concerns over the past two decades, and things improved a lot.

I was a member of an environmental group working for clean air and water while using natural resources wisely. While we often don't agree with the method to reach that goal, the goal is good. Today, almost all global pollution is not Oregon sourced. The cap-and-trade bill does not offer a solution. The issue is power and money, so look at who benefits.

If you look on page 34, section 39, of the 94-page bill as amended dated Feb. 14, the following are to prioritize greenhouse gas reduction with the money they receive: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board gets 25% of the \$700 million this bill is expected to extract from us all annually, local governments get 20%, and another 20% goes to agencies of the state.

You also will see a long list of Indian tribes that will share 10%. In

About the author

Granelia Thompson is a resident of Weston. 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.

addition to the cash, they have to be consulted by local governments in their climate plans and have a part in rulemaking (sections 25, 27, 36 and 104).

While I think they should certainly have a place at the table, this part of the bill everyone should know. Their support for this bill is no surprise.

Another part of the bill (section 39d) states that state forestry cannot

use any of this money for fire suppression, yet forest fires contributed 141.1 million metric tons of greenhouse gases in 2017 alone, according to the EPA. You'd think preventing that would be important. They do allow 25% of the funds to be spent for mitigating the consequences of wildfire response (section 39 5e).

The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Board will be made up of one member jointly appointed by legislative leaders from the Republican Party and one from the Democratic Party who serves on a committee related to climate (section 97). Several positions, like the director of the Department of Environmental Quality, are on the board. The governor appoints 10 members on this board, from groups such as Environmental Justice Task Force, and one tribal member. Natural resources and other impacted businesses are not included.

Accountability is a problem, as not all portions of this bill would be available via public record request, and the public has no input, only other agencies. Section 109 states the board, governor, PUC, Energy Facilities Siting Council and Department of Transportation may adopt rules and issue orders to carry out provisions.

YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. Fax: 202-228-3997. Website: merkley.senate.gov/. Email: merkley.senate.gov/contact/. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; email elizabeth_scheeler@merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510-3703; phone: 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. Website: wyden.senate.gov. Email: wyden.senate.gov/contact/. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; email kathleen_cathey@wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2185 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-0001, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Website: walden.house.gov/. Email: walden.house.gov/e-mail-greg. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, email jorden.noyes@mail.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 900 Court St. N.E., Salem, OR 97301; 503-378-4582.

Oregon Secretary of State Bev Clarno: 136 State Capitol. Salem OR 97310-0722; 503-986-1523.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Reed: 350 Winter St. N.E., Suite 100, Salem, OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4329.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

State Sen. William S. Hansell (29th District/Pendleton): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-423, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1729. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/hansell. Email: sen.billhansell@oregonlegislature.gov.

State Rep. Greg Barreto (58th District/Cove): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-384, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1458. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/barreto. Email: rep.gregbarreto@oregonlegislature.gov.

State Rep. Greg Smith (57th District): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-482, Salem, OR, 97301; 503-986-1457. Heppner office: P.O. Box 219, Heppner, OR 97836; 541-676-5154; Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/smith. Email: rep.gregsmith@oregonlegislature.gov.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

City of La Grande: Mayor Steve Clements, City Manager Robert Strope; P.O. Box 670, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-1309; fax 541-963-3333.

Union County Commissioners: Donna Beverage, Matt Scarfo and Paul Anderes; 1106 K Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-963-1001; fax 541-963-1079.

Wallowa County Commissioners: John Hillock, Todd Nash and Susan Roberts; 101 S. River St., Room 202, Enterprise, OR 97828; 541-426-4543, ext. 11; fax 541-426-0582.

Elgin City Councilors: Mayor Allan Duffy, 501 N 11th St., 541-437-1016, mayor@cityofelginor.org; Mary West, 260 N 5th Ave., 541-805-0443, councilor3@cityofelginor.org; Kathy Warren, PO Box 697, 541-786-9611, councilor6@cityofelginor.org; Risa Halgarth, PO Box 525, 541-437-9462, councilor2@cityofelginor.org; Rocky Burgess, 800 N 14th St., PO. Box 854, 541-786-2417, councilor1@cityofelginor.org; David Reed, 1011 Detroit St., PO Box 368; 541-975-3306, councilor4@cityofelginor.org; Ryan Martin, councilor5@cityofelginor.org.

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Phone: **541-963-3161**
Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214
Fax: 541-963-7804
Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com
Website: www.lagrandeobserver.com
Street address: 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande

POSTMASTER
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STAFF

Publisher.....Karrine Brogotti	Classifieds.....Devi Mathson
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