

Other Views

Urban, younger Oregonians believe they can have more impact

A large percentage (43%) of Oregonians do not believe they can make their community a better place to live, according to a recent Oregon Values and Beliefs Center survey. That figure becomes a majority among Oregonians ages 65 and over; just 62% do not believe they can have a big or moderate effect



KEVIN FRAZIER
LAW STUDENT

on their community. That percentage is also a majority among rural Oregonians (54%). Comparatively, urban (64%) and younger (66%) Oregonians feel much more capable of having a positive effect.

What explains these differences? There's no one answer. Instead a variety of factors have convinced some Oregonians that the system is just too stacked against them to be able to turn the gears in their favor.

One explanatory factor: access to information. Nearly 6 in 10 urban Oregonians have a high degree of trust in the people who publish the news about their community, whereas just 4 in 10 rural Oregonians share that view. There's also a 10 percentage point gap in how much Oregonians in the tri-county area trust broadcast news when compared to Oregonians in the rest of the state (57% versus 47%).

The connection between faith in local news and faith in capacity to incite change makes sense. If you feel confident that you know what's going on in your neck of the woods, then you likely feel capable of getting involved or at least staying informed about major changes in your community.

Another factor impacting the impact gap — personal security. Oregonians 65 and over seem to feel more in control over their personal well-being. A full 85% of these older Oregonians reported they feel able to control what is important in their lives on a majority of days. That number plummets to 65% for Oregonians between 18 and 29 years old. Perhaps insecurity about their own lives spurs younger Oregonians to feel as though it's only through community-wide changes that they can improve their own well-being.

One final factor and more evidence for the thesis: disparities in how much people feel as though community leaders care about their needs. Almost 60% of younger Oregonians agree that "(t)he people running my community don't really care much about what happens to me." On the opposite side of the spectrum, only 44% of older Oregonians doubt the responsiveness of their community leaders.

Why these gaps matter

Our democracy hinges on its perceived legitimacy. If people don't feel as though the levers of change are responsive to their efforts to make their community better, then faith and participation in our democracy understandably decreases. Consider that around half of Oregonians in the tri-county area are somewhat or very satisfied with the way our democracy works, but only 39% of Oregonians in the rest of the state share that level of satisfaction.

The aforementioned factors suggest that we've got a lot of work to do when it comes to giving Oregonians the information and leaders they deserve.

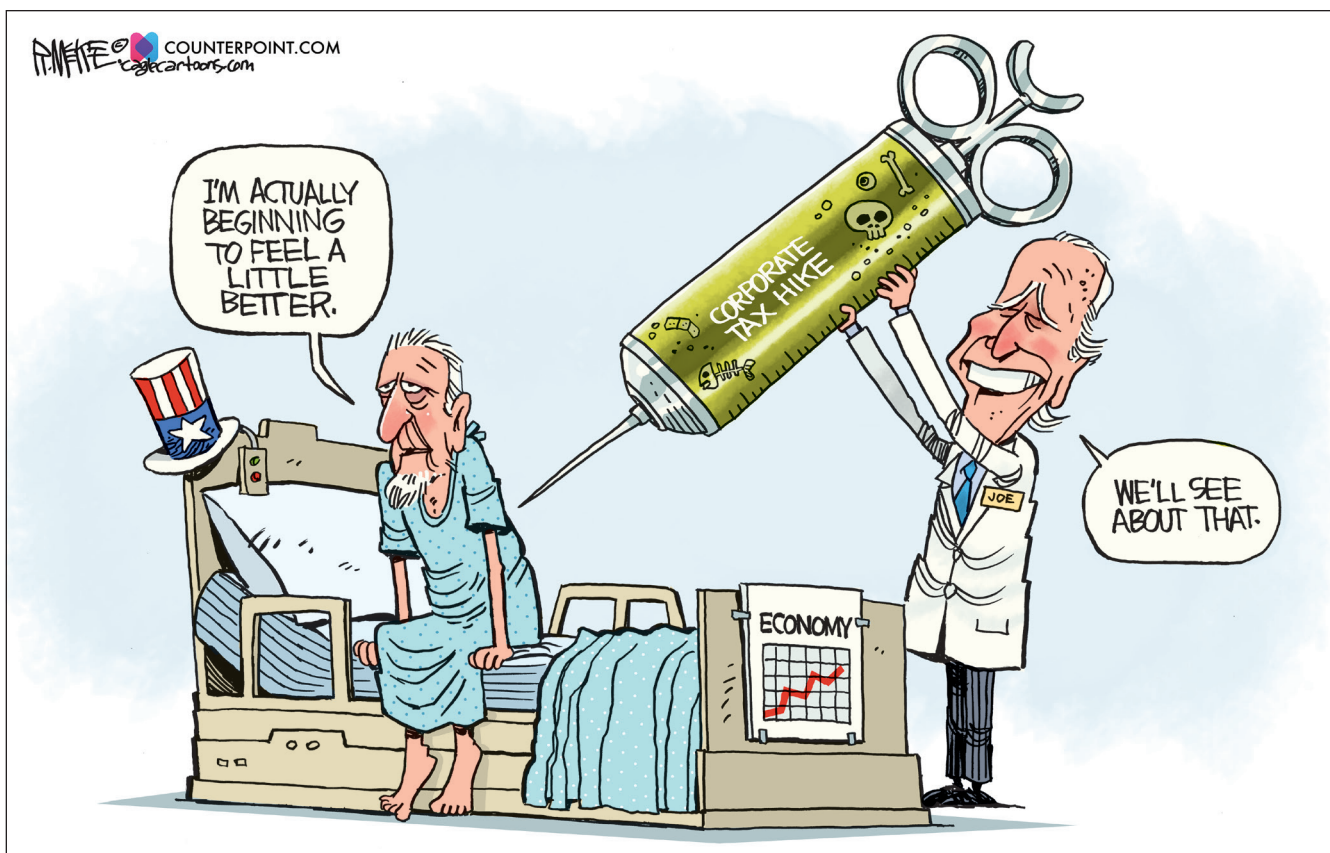
What are some ways to chip away at this impact gap? First, address news deserts. Oregonians in every community deserve news that's well-funded and well-resourced so that they can keep local officials accountable and share opportunities about how and when to get involved.

Second, make our elected officials more accountable to voters, not special interests. One way this is happening is through campaign finance reform. This will help give all Oregonians a chance to impact an election, while also reducing the extreme sway wealthy individuals and organizations hold over candidates.

Third, we can end the idea of Oregon exceptionalism when it comes to good governance. This may sound harsh, but Oregon is not living up to its own standards when it comes to being a leader in democracy. Across the urban/rural divide and age spectrum, only 1 out of every 4 Oregonians think the state's democracy has gotten stronger in the last four years. That's abysmal.

To improve our democracy here in Oregon, we have to be more open about the fact that it's flawed and more intentional about instituting meaningful reforms.

Kevin Frazier was raised in Washington County. He is pursuing a law degree at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.



My Voice

Are you willing to pay for the B2H project?



FUJI KREIDER
LA GRANDE

People ask, "Is that still going on?" Yes, it's true the massively destructive Boardman to Hemingway (B2H) transmission project is still under review. Each time we've asked folks to speak out, it's more critical that they do.

Thursday, April 15, is the final hearing at the Oregon Public Utilities Commission on Idaho Power's 2019 energy plan, which features B2H. The OPUC commissioners have been impressed with the number of public comments already received, and now is the most important opportunity to speak out with your reactions to Idaho Power's power play.

Building the line will guarantee them cost recovery and a hefty 7.6% profit based on the project's \$1.2 billion cost. Good for them. Bad for us.

In 2015 when I started tracking these plans (integrated resources plans), the Idaho Power Company claimed it needed 351 megawatts of energy by 2026 to replace energy from coal plant closures. Rather than building its own resources to satisfy this need, the company wanted to buy energy from the Mid Columbia energy trading hub and transmit it hundreds of miles away. That's where the B2H comes in.

Closing coal plants is definitely worth supporting. But destroying hun-

dreds of miles of private and public lands, habitats and sacred places — in addition to us footing the bill — is not the way. Contrary to the company's green-washing narrative, there are many ways for it to get or make the energy it may need.

Now, after six years and three IRPs, the "need" has been reduced from 351 MW to 42 MW — and in the Idaho's PUC review, the company states the need will be only 5 MW by 2029! This reduction has been occurring even with Idaho Power actively resisting more solar and wind contracts, battery storage or building any of its own energy resources. It has discouraged renewable energy projects through state legislation and is de-incentivizing rooftop solar among customers. The industry's innovations, appliance and building efficiencies, and people's own conservation, continues driving down the need.

That's right — 42 or 5 MW of energy need by 2029? They can easily make that up with a small solar farm or simple energy efficiencies, respectively. My point is: There is plenty of energy and energy generation potential in Idaho. The "need" can be easily canceled. So without a need, why the B2H? For Idaho Power it's all about profits. Not only through the guaranteed return on investment on the capital project (B2H), but the company can continue to gain profits through transmission tariffs. At the Oregon Public Utilities Commission the discussion has evolved into "regional grid capacity and resiliency," and

"costs to the ratepayers." (Since the BPA is currently a partner in the B2H that means that we, as Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative members, are also ratepayers in this arrangement.)

I've asked for an analysis on upgrading and reconducting the three lines that go from the Mid Columbia Hub to Idaho, from 230-kilovolt to 345-kV lines. The increased capacity of these three lines could yield a total of 345 kV more capacity. These lines could be fire-hardened; they could be digitized and the corridors could be cleared out — all benefiting actions bringing much more security and resiliency into the current system while reducing fire risks.

If Idaho Power really needed the capacity in the future — which is questionable — the Oregon PUC (the regulators in this case) should order the company to study upgrading before planning and building new!

There won't be another opportunity to influence the OPUC for at least another year, and by then much more work will be completed in the permitting process. Not good. Therefore, we need to tell the OPUC: Do not acknowledge this project any longer! We can't afford it and it is not needed. Write Now (before April 15) to puc.publiccomments@state.or.us. For more info, check out www.stopb2h.org.

Now is the time to act!

Fuji Kreider has lived in La Grande 34 years and is a member of the local nonprofit Stop B2H Coalition..

Letters

Thoughts on CHD, urban renewal

The recent letters on the Center for Human Development by Barbara Smutz and Hazel Spiegel were great. The staff at CHD has done so much for the citizens in this area of Oregon and we are so indebted to them. We have compared the outstanding work the CHD staff did here in La Grande with what two of our daughters experienced. They live in Korea and North Carolina and have not been able to get a COVID-19 vaccine shot yet.

Changing the subject. I have a real concern over the La Grande urban renewal. We paid \$325 to urban renewal this last tax year. I would rather see that money go to street improvement.

There was a time when a person going into a business dealt with a lending institution, bank or whatever and never received funds to start that business, or once in business they didn't get a grant from something like urban renewal. Why should the

citizens of La Grande be taxed to help a business when they give that business funds by purchasing an item from them?

Give this some serious thought.
*Gary Feasel
La Grande*

Environmental justice lacking in proposed B2H transmission line

On Thursday, April 15, the Oregon Public Utility Commission will hold its final hearing on Idaho Power's 2019 energy plan, which includes the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line.

I've urged OPUC to acknowledge issues of environmental justice when considering approval for the B2H transmission line.

I believe Idaho Power is not shouldering the true environmental cost of the proposed B2H line, that Idaho Power is instead passing the cost of impacts to economically disadvantaged rural communities.

For instance, Idaho Power claims "no significant impact" for 150-foot transmission towers that would

be built a few blocks from a beautiful mountain lake, the key feature of the cherished and historical city of La Grande Morgan Lake Park. If the B2H line impacted such a park in Portland, I do not believe it would be going forward.

Fire risks are another cost/hardship passed on to our fire-vulnerable rural communities. Rural citizens demand to be treated fairly and to have our environment considered and protected.

There are other options to building the B2H line, even if a transmission line is determined to be necessary. Concerned citizens with STOP B2H Coalition have outlined many such alternatives (see www.stopb2h.org). I've asked the commission to pursue these options, taking into account environmental justice issues and the true cost of the B2H transmission lines to economically disadvantaged rural communities.

Please consider doing the same before the 15th. Write: puc.publiccomments@state.or.us.

*Kathryn Andrew
La Grande*

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Phone: 541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

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STAFF

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