

OUR VIEW

Closed doors disfavor the Oregon public

When President Biden gave his State of the Union speech earlier this month, one part stung.

“If you travel 20 miles east of Columbus, Ohio, you’ll find 1,000 empty acres of land,” Biden said. “It won’t look like much, but if you stop and look closely, you’ll see a ‘Field of Dreams,’ the ground on which America’s future will be built. This is where Intel, the American company that helped build Silicon Valley, is going to build its \$20 billion semiconductor mega site. Up to eight state-of-the-art factories in one place, 10,000 new good-paying jobs.”

We know that’s a long quote. That’s what made it sting all the more. Intel chose Ohio for that \$20 billion investment. Not Oregon. Gov. Kate Brown had made courting Intel expansion a priority. Intel went to Ohio.

Congratulations, Ohio. Oregon officials — government and business — responded. A chip industry task force was formed and staffed by the Oregon Business Council. The co-chairs are Gov. Brown, Sen. Ron Wyden and Portland General Electric CEO Maria Pope. There are a lot more big names in government and in business on that task force. It met recently with one of Intel’s top executives. That’s an effort to develop a road map to bring more semiconductor manufacturing and research to the state, according to reporting by The Oregonian.

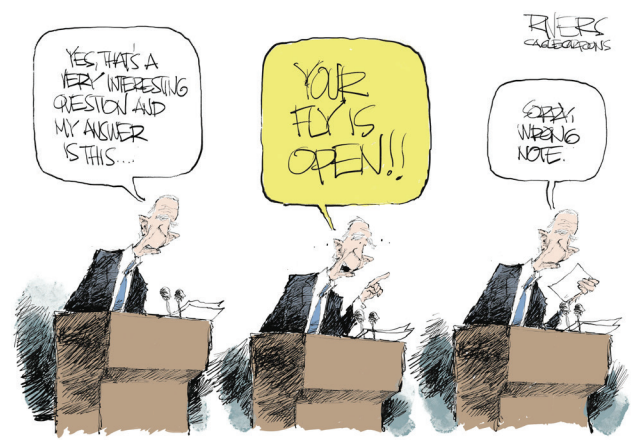
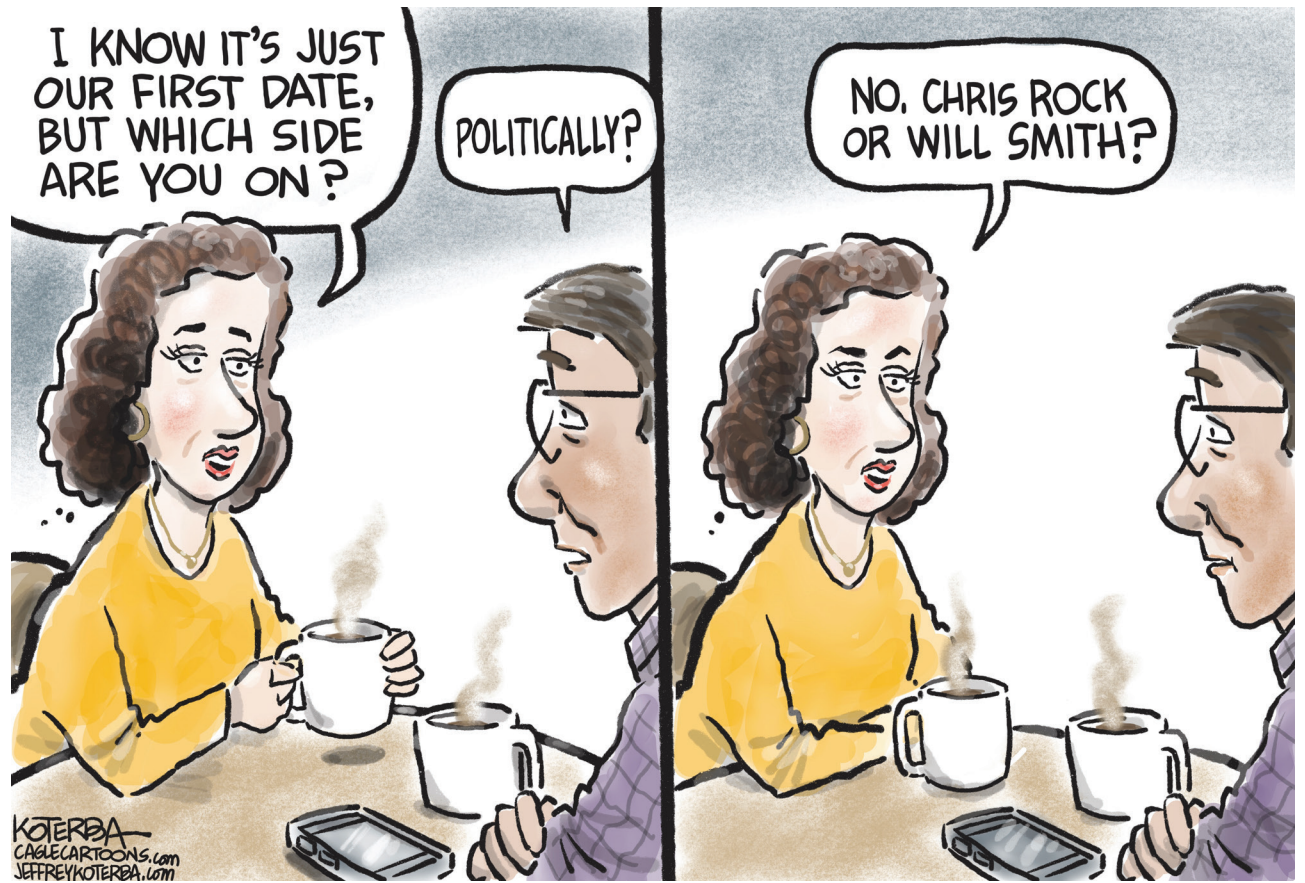
We appreciate the Oregon Business Council’s work in making this happen. It needs to get done.

But here’s something else that stings. These meetings are being held behind closed doors. Critical decisions that will form the basis for policy in Oregon are being discussed behind those closed doors. What trade-offs or promises are being considered? Which ones are passed over and why? Are they considering exceptions to state land use law?

There are reasons to believe these meetings are under no legal obligation to be open to the public. The task force wasn’t created by a government entity. It doesn’t have the authority to create laws or regulations.

There’s also, though, the intent of the requirement for public meetings in Oregon. It’s not only for Oregonians to be able to witness final decisions. It’s also to be able to witness the making of policy, the things leading up to decisions. That can tell you important things about elected officials, too. Oregon government bodies even find ways to hold executive sessions to discuss proprietary business matters and pivot to open sessions to have policy discussions. Gov. Brown’s office pointed out any policy that originated from the discussions would go through a public process. And Wyden’s office said he would ensure there would be a public report from the task force. They both mentioned proprietary information. Behind closed doors, there could be frank discussions about what Intel needed without putting Oregon at a disadvantage competing with other states.

We understand that point. It’s not completely true, though. Intel can go from state to state, having proprietary discussions with state leaders behind closed doors, and know what states might do to lure its billions. It’s Intel that is the one not at a disadvantage. It’s the Oregon public that certainly is.



Choose forest protection over biomass energy



MARINA RICHIE
OTHER VIEWS

It’s no secret that the peaks and rivers of Northeastern Oregon are magnificent, but there is a lesser-known wonder. This corner of the state is poised to weather climate instability better than most other places. Why? There are still intact forest headwaters holding and filtering waters — vital to fish and farmer alike. The remaining big trees and ancient groves are storing tons of carbon dioxide, and sheltering both wildlife and the human spirit, too.

That’s why we must choose protection of our mature and ancient forests over false promises of biomass — the burning of trees as “renewable energy.” Biomass burning power plants emit 150% the carbon dioxide of coal, and 300%-400% of the carbon dioxide of natural gas, per unit energy produced.

The “renewable” argument goes this way — trees grow back and will then once again store carbon. But trees burned today release carbon dioxide today — and seedlings take a long time to grow and cannot come close to rivaling the carbon storage of trees that are even 30 years old, let alone a century or more. Scientific studies are conclusive that the older and bigger trees store far more carbon and for

longer than young trees.

I am mystified why biomass energy is taking off in Northeastern Oregon with a heavy reliance on subsidies — it’s not cost effective. There’s also the insidious argument that biomass simply uses up excess pieces of wood that would otherwise go to waste. No. Biomass creates a huge drive for wood, wood and more wood to burn. That wood comes at the expense of fish and wildlife habitat, functioning ecosystems and carbon sequestration.

Why would we want to add even more carbon dioxide into our atmosphere with some vague notion we will lower it later? Here in the West, we are in the worst megadrought in 1,200 years, according to a February 2022 report in the journal Nature Climate Change.

And that’s not all — the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change just released findings showing we are in big trouble — with billions of people around the world already suffering from sea rise, heat, flooding and extreme weather. We’re seeing the effects here, and it’s not going to get better with false solutions.

We must move quickly to reduce fossil fuel emissions and safeguard our carbon-storing trees. Instead, we’re adding a staggering 40 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide per year to the atmosphere, while we’re destroying the forests that are our allies.

But, what about the wildfires? Don’t we have to thin forests in

response and why shouldn’t we then burn those trees for biomass? But here’s the problem — thinning is often a term for industrial logging that is applied not just at the wildland urban interface but across wide swaths of forests and in the backcountry. Logging makes wildfires — and the climate crisis — worse.

Wildfires may billow smoke, but the vast majority of forest carbon stays on site. Not so for biomass burned to completion. Yes, there will be more wildfires, but we live in ecosystems that have evolved with fire, but not logging. The key is to protect our communities by using our limited resources to thin small trees close to homes.

We can still keep Northeastern Oregon climate-resilient and beautiful — if we act now. Protect our mature and older forests and big trees on federal lands. Explore mechanisms to pay private landowners well for keeping their trees standing. Embrace solar, wind and energy conservation — in ways that preserve our natural ecosystems that are our last best hope.

I think we all want future generations to know the vanilla scent of a centuries-old pine and to be able to dip their toes into clear, cold, fish-filled rivers.

■ Marina Richie is a natural history writer, journalist and author of the forthcoming book “Halcyon Journey in Search of the Belted Kingfisher.” She is a prior resident of La Grande and now makes her home in Bend.

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THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Phone: 541-963-3161

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

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POSTMASTER Send address changes to: The Observer, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

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