

OUR VIEW

# Let the state know where you stand

The push to give cities in Oregon more leverage to decarbonize buildings got defanged in the Legislature this year. Instead, the bill got a do-over. It created a task force to look at ways to decarbonize buildings. If opponents of Senate Bill 1518 thought they won a victory, it seems they won a delay. The task force has a list of policy options it is getting ready for the 2023 Legislature that are even more wide-ranging. Maybe legislators won't take action on all of them. But watching the options the task force is considering could be like looking into a crystal ball to see Oregon's energy future. That's especially true if Democrats continue to control the Legislature and the governor's office after November.

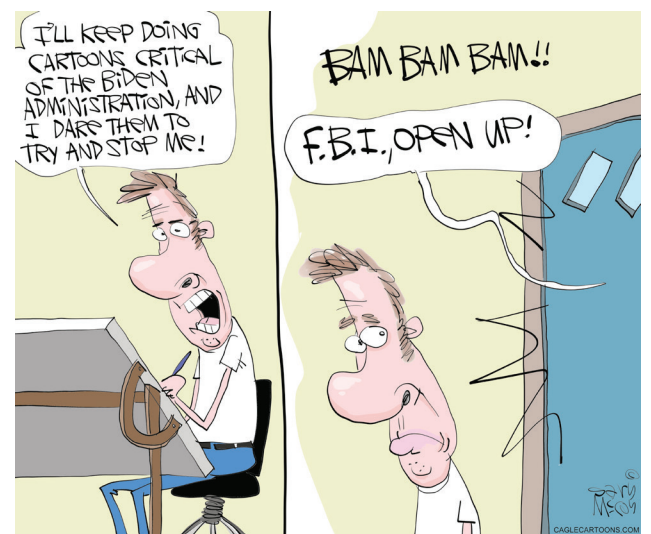
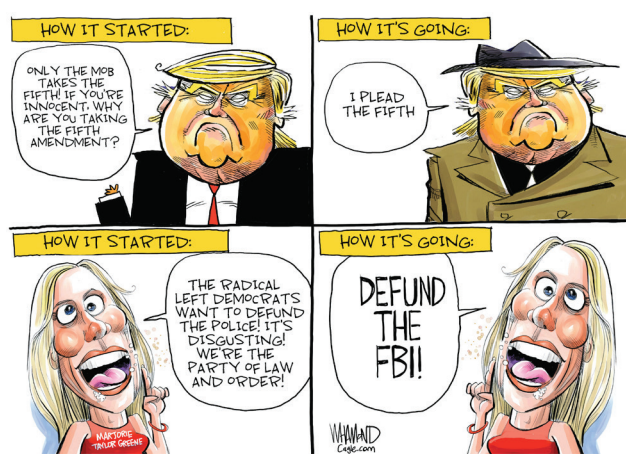
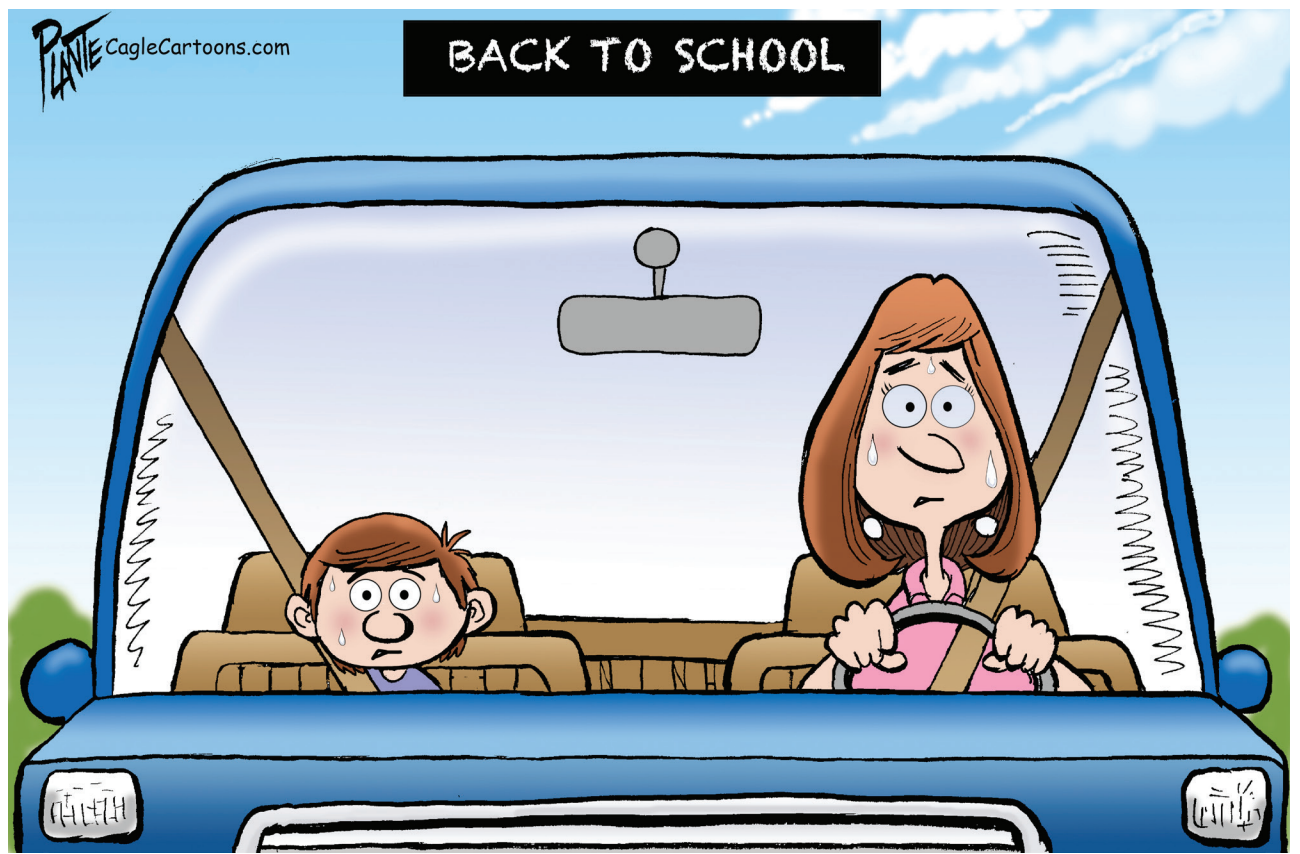
Electrify. Electrify. Electrify. That's a consistent theme. Natural gas for heat, for cooking? Yes there are voices on the task force who keep bringing up how natural gas should continue to play a role. Maybe we are wrong, but those voices sure don't seem to reflect the majority view. The task force wants renewable electricity to be king. We could hear it Tuesday, Aug. 9, in the discussion about a possible new mission for the Energy Trust of Oregon. The discussion was to change its mission. The Energy Trust gets its money from customers of the big utilities and uses it to stoke energy efficiency. It is now fuel neutral. Electricity and natural gas are both OK. The proposal is to change its purpose to greenhouse gas reduction and equity. Oregon's natural gas companies may not appreciate that.

We could hear the call for the electricity focus in the discussion of electric heat pumps. Heat pumps can heat and cool. They do what they do very efficiently. Task force members talked about ways to encourage more people to install them — incentives on top of any new federal incentives or existing incentives.

There was even a discussion about the state bypassing the choices consumers or builders make for appliances in new homes and going to manufacturers and distributors. The thinking is incentives or rules could guide manufacturers and distributors to offer only options powered by electricity and that are high-efficiency. Then no "wrong" choices would be made.

Another topic that came up is to follow California's lead on requiring appliances to be "smart." Smart in this context is that appliances can schedule their use when there is less electricity demand. So maybe your car charger or dishwasher kicks itself on at 1 a.m. That could help spread out the energy demand over the day and reduce the need for peak electric capacity. Oregonians might like it, if they could control it. They might not like it if someone else was switching their appliances on and off.

What's missing in these discussions is the input of Oregonians. Yes, there are many fine people on the task force and they represent different perspectives and interests. You should take a look at the ideas on the table and tell them what you want. You can see the concepts under consideration here, [tinyurl.com/Oregon081022](https://tinyurl.com/Oregon081022). And you can tell the task force what you think by email here, [JTFREB.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:JTFREB.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov).



## Offering suggestions with criticism

**ANDREW CUTLER**  
FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Constructive criticism of government agencies is part of the job description for journalists and I like to think we do a pretty good job of ensuring we keep an eye out that taxpayers don't get bilked.

Newspapers are designed to do many things at once, including watching those appointed or elected by voters keep the best interests of voters at the forefront of their decisions.

Yet our watchdog-like approach is like two sides of the same coin. One side is devoted to observing and reporting — and through our editorial page — criticizing government agencies and nonprofits.

The other side of the coin, though, is as important. That side is one where we strive to give credit where credit is due. For the most part, local government agencies, employees and elected leaders are

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doing a pretty good job. They're good people, devoted to trying to do the best they can in what can be, and often is, a thankless job.

Occasionally I will run across public criticism of elected officials or non-profits that evolves into a head scratcher. The First Amendment allows all of us to share our opinions, but I would suggest it also gives us all an unspoken privilege to also find a way to deliver constructive feedback to help develop a solution.

Sitting on the sideline and attacking a particular policy or lawmaker is fine, but the real test of civic responsibility is an effort to provide suggestions with that criticism.

Too often I see criticism but no suggestions on how to fix a specific problem or policy. Throwing stones at public officials is fine, as far as it

goes, but without a viable suggestion to fix the problem that criticism misses the mark and is, in the end, not very productive. Choosing to call out a problem or challenge isn't that difficult. There are plenty of things that need to be adjusted or fixed in our government agencies. Yet delivering a criticism or complaint without offering a solution doesn't do a whole lot except create more problems.

We need to keep an eye on our government agencies and nonprofits, but we also should be aware that our responsibility as voters also includes the capacity to deliver a solution.

■ Andrew Cutler is the interim editor of The Observer and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing The Observer, East Oregonian and four more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.

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