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Opinion

Editorial Board

Publisher
Mike O'Brien
opinions@capitalpress.com

Editor
Joe Beach
Online: www.capitalpress.com/opinion

Managing Editor
Carl Sampson

OUR VIEW

Plan offers hope on rural Oregon's minimum wage

Oregon's poorly conceived minimum wage law — like so many Oregon laws the product of a half-baked ballot initiative — has abused farmers, ranchers, food processors and other businesses large and small since it went into effect 11 years ago.

It has also abused their employees.

The law calls for Oregon's minimum wage to automatically increase each year based on the U.S. City Average Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers. That means when the cost of living goes up in U.S. cities, the minimum wage

across Oregon must increase by the same percentage. Whether a business is in booming Portland or tiny Mitchell, Ore., population 130, the minimum wage must be the same.

The problem: Oregon's minimum wage often goes up even when the rural cost of living goes down or stays the same.

The impact can be significant. In John Day, Ore., the McDonald's recently closed its doors because of the "low economics of the situation," its owner said. In an area with 9.1 percent unemployment the loss of 18 jobs was a big deal.

While minimum wage

increases over the years are not the sole reason for the loss of those jobs, they were a contributing factor.

Across Oregon, farmers who depend on temporary workers for harvest and other hand work have had to tighten their budgets to cover higher minimum wages.

We remind those of our readers unfamiliar with agriculture that farmers and ranchers are generally price-takers, meaning they cannot unilaterally raise prices as expenses such as payroll increase.

Comes now an idea that at least acknowledges the fact that the economy in Portland is vastly

different from elsewhere in the state. Sen. Michael Dembrow, chairman of the Oregon Senate Workforce Committee, has proposed three regional minimum wages in Oregon. The minimum wage would be highest in Portland and lowest in rural Oregon.

"We needed to take into account cost of living and economic vitality in different parts of the state," he told reporter Paris Achen of our Capital Bureau, a collaboration between EO Media Group, which owns the Capital Press, and Pamplin Media Group.

The proposal, the details of which have not yet been determined, is aimed at averting a

ballot initiative that would jump Oregon's statewide minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Another initiative would increase it to \$13.50 and give cities the authority to increase it more.

Either initiative would hammer farmers, ranchers and food processors. Dembrow's proposal represents a compromise that would soften the blow to the rural economy.

Though we're still against constant efforts to increase the minimum wage, we do appreciate the senator's recognition that Oregon's rural economy is in a far more precarious condition than the state's urban economies.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

Daylight saving time an anachronism

A Medford, Ore., man hopes to have daylight saving time eliminated by popular vote.

If he and his followers gather the 117,578 signatures needed to get it on the ballot, we suspect the initiative will succeed.

It's a practice that seems to have little practical utility.

Springing forward and falling back seems easy enough, but in practice it can be pretty confusing.

First, the name is a bit of a misnomer. No daylight is saved, it is merely reallocated to different ends of the day by manipulating the clock.

In summer, when daylight lasts longer, the clock is set an hour fast. That pushes sunrise ahead an hour — from 4:30 to 5:30 — when more people are sleeping and sunset later when more people are awake.

As the days grow shorter, the

clock is reset to standard time. That means the sun rises earlier in the day, allowing more people to begin the day with natural light.

All of this is an artificial construct. Sunrise and sunset depend entirely on the spinning earth's tilt on its axis as it orbits the sun.

One bit of lore holds that an American Indian said of daylight saving time that only the government could cut one end off a blanket, sew it on the other end and believe it has made the blanket longer.

We are only fooling ourselves — and not altogether successfully.

For factory and office workers, whose movements are governed by the clock, daylight saving time can be a boon in the summer. But the semi-annual fiddling with the clock inevitably leads to confusion, and there's evidence that the

manipulation isn't good for the natural rhythms of our bodies.

And recent studies suggest that the energy savings that originally prompted its adoption during World War I have largely evaporated 100 years later when artificial lighting and air conditioning enter into the equation.

Farmers have traditionally lobbied against daylight saving time — dairy farmers, in particular, whose herds' milking habits don't recognize changes in the clock.

So, it seems as though there's no reason to keep daylight saving time.

Except the only thing worse than artificially manipulating time is unilaterally correcting it. We think Oregon being out of sync with Washington and California as they observe daylight saving time would be entirely too confusing.

Agriculture the foundation of Oregon's economy

It didn't surprise anyone around here, but a recent report from Oregon State University economists says food, fiber and other aspects of state agriculture are an outsized contributor to the state's economy.

Farming and ranching, and the businesses related to them — warehousing, transportation, wholesale and retail sales and processing operations — are linked to \$50 billion in Oregon sales. Agriculture accounts for 10.6 percent, or \$22.9 billion, of Oregon's net state product. Agriculture and its associated industries represent 326,617 full- and part-time jobs, or 13.2 percent of all jobs in Oregon.

And all of this has its start with principal farm and ranch operators, who represent less than 1 percent of the population.

Even in a state filled with foodies, agriculture can be taken for granted. Even in the depths of the

recession, agriculture continued to drive the state's economy.

"It's kind of like the foundation of your house," economist Bruce Sorte told the Capital Press. "You don't think about it much but you're glad it's there."

Produced by economists, the report understandably rests on what can be objectively measured. But in comments included in the report, Katy Coba, director of Oregon's Department of Agriculture, suggests the real value of farming and ranching to the state comes in something less tangible, but still very real.

"Agriculture's contributions to our economy and to our environment are important," she said. "But frankly, its contribution to what is the fabric of Oregon is most noteworthy. Oregon would not be what it is without our agriculture industry."

No, not a surprise at all.

Letters policy

Write to us: Capital Press welcomes letters to the editor on issues of interest to farmers, ranchers and the agribusiness community.

Letters policy: Please limit letters to 300 words and include your home address and a daytime telephone number with your submission. Longer pieces, 500-750 words, may be considered as guest com-

mentary pieces for use on the opinion pages. Guest commentary submissions should also include a photograph of the author.

Send letters via email to opinions@capitalpress.com. Emailed letters are preferred and require less time to process, which could result in quicker publication. Letters also may be sent to P.O. Box 2048, Salem, OR 97308; or by fax to 503-370-4383.

After Paris agreement, U.S. must lead climate efforts by pricing carbon

By MARK REYNOLDS
For the Capital Press

After decades of contentious and often acrimonious negotiations, the nations of the world have come together with an agreement that places our civilization on a path toward avoiding the worst effects of climate change.

The Paris accord is one of those rare moments when every nation acknowledges that, for the good of all, we must act as one.

"It was a wonderful surprise that after the incredible disappointment of Copenhagen, these 195 countries could come to an agreement more ambitious than anyone imagined," said Jim Yong Kim, the World Bank president. "This never happens."

The ambition Kim refers to is the goal of not only staying under 2 degrees Celsius

Guest comment
Mark Reynolds



of warming since the Industrial Revolution, but working toward limiting warming to 1.5 C. The lower target is viewed as essential for the survival of low-lying island nations already disappearing from sea-level rise and for avoiding some of the worst consequences of climate change — worsening storms, food shortages, mass migrations.

President Obama was not exaggerating when he hailed the Paris agreement as "a turning point for the world," saying that it "establishes the enduring framework the world needs to solve the climate crisis."

As organizers of the Paris conference will be the first

to admit, the commitments made by nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be insufficient to prevent global warming from exceeding the 2 C warming threshold, let alone 1.5 C. For that reason, the agreement calls for nations to revisit their commitments every five years, with the expectation that national goals will be made increasingly ambitious.

Leadership from the United States is needed to marshal global efforts against carbon pollution. Right now, unfortunately, that leadership is less than inspiring.

Forced by a recalcitrant Congress to take matters into his own hands, President Obama initiated the Clean Power Plan, which uses Environmental Protection Agency regulations to reduce carbon dioxide emissions at power plants. The EPA rules have met with stiff opposition from

congressional Republicans, and both the House and the Senate have passed resolutions of disapproval under the Congressional Review Act.

But instead of just saying "no" to the Clean Power Plan, Republicans could offer a market-based alternative that would eliminate the need for EPA regulations. By placing a fee on carbon and returning the revenue to American households, we can incentivize a clean-energy economy without increasing the size of government. Meanwhile, applying border tariffs to imports from nations that lack an equivalent price on carbon will protect American businesses and provide the incentive for all nations to establish a price on carbon — the single biggest step a country can take to meet its climate goals.

A study released last year from Regional Economic

Models Inc. confirms that this solution, known as Carbon Fee and Dividend, would achieve the necessary reductions in greenhouse gas emissions while also benefiting the economy. REMI analyzed a fee on fossil fuels, starting at \$10 per ton of CO2 and rising \$10 per ton annually. After 20 years, CO2 emissions would fall 50 percent and 2.8 million jobs would be added, primarily because of the stimulus of recycling the carbon fee revenue back into the economy.

Those who scoff at the notion of Republicans considering legislation to price carbon may have missed a couple of recent developments:

- North Dakota Republican Congressman Kevin Cramer recently floated the idea of swapping out EPA climate regulations with a carbon tax.
- Twelve House Republicans have sponsored a resolution acknowledging the threat

of climate change and calling upon Congress to work on solutions.

Congressional opponents have said the U.S. should not act on climate change for two principal reasons: It won't make any difference if the U.S. acts alone, and measures to cut carbon will kill jobs. But neither excuse is valid any longer — the Paris accord ensures that the U.S. will not be acting alone, while the REMI study demonstrates the positive effects a well-designed carbon price would have on the American economy.

The world has taken a great step toward leaving a livable world for future generations. Leadership from the U.S. in the form of a market-based climate solution can ensure that the promises of Paris are kept.

Mark Reynolds is executive director of Citizens' Climate Lobby.