

OUR VIEW

Statewide officials need statewide perspective

A ballot initiative to carve California into three states reminds us of another idea that surfaced three years ago in eastern Oregon and Washington. It would make those largely rural regions a part of Idaho, whose state government is more agriculture-friendly. Idaho leaders have staked the state’s future on agriculture, while many Washington and Oregon leaders appear to be more interested in other more urbane pursuits. When they do take note

of agriculture, they tend to focus only on certain segments instead of the overall industry. The proposals to redraw the borders of California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho are efforts to gain more recognition from statewide office holders. In California, a state with nearly 40 million people, the urban areas have the lion’s share of political clout in Sacramento. Farmers and ranchers find themselves ignored or treated as second-class Californians. Issues

important to them often take a backseat to urban concerns. While politicians are expected to represent their districts, they also have a duty to learn about and represent the state as a whole. What’s good for Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego is important, but not to the detriment of the other parts of the state, and vice versa. A statewide perspective means keeping the interests of all Californians in mind. Residents of eastern Oregon

and Washington, both rural areas dependent on farming, ranching and timber, also say they are under represented in Salem and Olympia. The fact that the Cascade Range splits the states makes the problem even worse. Westside politicians rarely make the trek over the mountains to the eastside — unless they are campaigning for office. If they win, eastside interests will usually take a backseat to westside priorities. Proponents say splitting

California or adding eastern Washington and Oregon to Idaho would provide a bigger voice for all in the new states. We doubt it. Drawing more lines on a map isn’t needed. What’s needed is politicians who take the time to learn about the rural areas of their states and look out for the interests of all citizens, not just those in their home districts with big wallets. They need to consider the welfare of their whole states.

OUR VIEW

Solar power, honeybees and saving farmland

It looks to us that officials in Oregon’s Clackamas County have stretched an exception in land-use laws to approve a large solar energy project on farmland. We support 1,000 Friends of Oregon in its appeal of the project’s conditional use permit before the state’s Land Use Board of Appeals. Under Oregon’s land use law, solar power facilities can be no larger than 12 acres without an exception to the statewide goal of preserving farmland. But Steve Schmitt and Pacific Northwest Solar LLC proposed building a 73-acre solar facility near Estacada in Clackamas County. The developer came up with a novel concept that convinced the county hearing officer the solar facility will not preclude the

property’s use as a commercial agricultural enterprise. The company plans to place 100 honeybee colonies at the site while cultivating “bee-friendly forage” around the solar panels and “shade resistant native plants” beneath them. The hearing officer ruled the project will not preclude the property’s use as a commercial agricultural enterprise and will take up less than 12 acres since the area under the panels will be used for forage. It’s a creative approach, but one we find problematic. We suspect this interpretation wasn’t quite what the drafters of the land use laws had in mind when they contemplated exceptions. There is no doubt that keeping bees is an agricultural pursuit, but in this

scenario it seems marginal compared to the potential of what could be produced on 73 acres of farm ground. That seems backwards. We look forward to the Land Board’s take on this question. The controversy has prompted the Oregon Board of Agriculture to seek stronger protections for farmland in the siting of energy projects. The production of “sustainable” and renewable energy is a priority for Oregonians. So is the preservation of the state’s farmland. Because solar and wind projects require the same open space often occupied by farmers and ranchers, these priorities are often in conflict with one another. At the very least, the rules for what can constitute an exception, and what cannot, must be made more clear.



Capital Press File
A 73-acre solar energy installation proposed to be built on farmland would share its location with honeybee habitat.

Readers’ views

Carbon taxes no solution to global warming

Thank you for publishing the letter of May 2018. I acknowledge the writer’s credentials and expertise, but dispute his assertions. Credentials are not evidence. I am not sure that being “a contributor to three Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports” is a positive credential, given that the IPCC is more political than scientific, and has been driven by passage of time and errors in its predictions to correct its excessive estimates. I note that much of the work involves computer simulations and projections, at best a highly uncertain area. The point of my prior letter was false and incorrect predictions of climate change and disaster, the list of which goes on and on. The writer did not dispute this point. Incorrect predictions discredit the predictors, aka prophets. When “The test of prophecy is waiting” (Pieper), “scientists” have failed that test over and over, as their predictions have not come true. Mark Twain, in “A Connecticut Yankee,” noted that false prophets seem more impressive when they predict things so far away in distance or time that they cannot be checked, but when they are near, can be checked, have been checked, and found false, their

impressiveness evaporates. We now have several decades of watching “scientific” predictions on global warming and climate change which have not come true. We also have many recent studies showing that articles in peer-reviewed journals are incorrect, use bad science, and/or are not replicable. We cannot trust the “authority” of such journals, but must evaluate them on the merits. (1) The 97 percent figure (consensus of scientists agreeing that human behavior contributes to global warming) is simply not correct, and has been discredited over and over. The Cook study is defective because of misrepresentation and overinclusion. Cook is cited, but not critics, not their criticisms of Cook. But even if correct, this would not answer the question of whether global warming is harmful or that human contributions are significant. (2) Researchers of Antarctic ice cores have noted a lag of about 1,400 years between carbon dioxide and atmospheric warming. The warming precedes carbon dioxide increases, and therefore cannot be caused by the carbon dioxide. A recent article in Scientific American (Ferguson, 3/1/2013) argues that this lag is “only” 200 years, not 1,400 years, but does not dispute the lag. Thus the assertion that “The ice cores tell us otherwise” is not correct. If temperatures warm today, but carbon dioxide increases only occur 200 or 1,400 years later, carbon dioxide cannot be the cause. This is “an inconvenient truth.” (3) The writer advocates a carbon tax, which is not justified by the evidence. Actually, he does not offer any evidence, except the ice cores, which do not provide evidence. He does say that carbon dioxide “should not be called a pollutant” and “some people have hijacked climate change to increase government and control human behavior.” Unfortunately, the support of carbon taxes does the same. (4) I note, lest I be misunderstood, that I do not dispute there is some global warming and that some human actions have been harmful, such as pollution, habitat destruction, deforestation and overuse of some environments. Global warming is cyclical, and has regularly occurred during the past. The questions are whether and to what extent it is “man-made” and “harmful.” However, false warnings and “solutions” divert us from solving the real problems. Much of human wealth and health today is directly attributable to the energy revolution, including coal and oil, which has extended human life and largely erased poverty. Carbon taxes are not a solution. Alan L. Gallagher
Canby, Ore.

Tools to help U.S. ag stay competitive

By MIKE JOHANNSS
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Mike Johanns



Every five or so years, the U.S. Congress has the difficult task of trying to pass an act that will guide the future of the agriculture industry, while simultaneously trying to minimize the rural/urban divide. This act historically has gone by many names, but is universally known as the “farm bill” and sets the table for some of the most efficient and innovative minds to help feed the world. It’s never easy to pass, not due to partisan politics generally, but rather as a result of where Americans call home. As the farm bill inches along, the focus for many in the agriculture sector is how well this bill can help the industry rise up and out of its current recession. With an industry that has survived a multi-year recession, deflated prices and a drop in net farm income by nearly 52 percent, some form of relief is greatly needed. However, while provisions in the farm bill can provide assistance over the next five years, there also needs to be a strong emphasis on helping the long-term well-being of the industry — specifically, through a greater focus on research and development. A recent presentation hosted by the American Enterprise Institute showed comprehensive evidence that research and development within the U.S. agriculture industry has dropped substantially over the last few decades. The drop is so severe that the U.S. is not only no longer the leader in agricultural research and development, but is being left behind by other countries in R&D spending. Research is critical to feeding a growing world population. The public-private partnerships that can rise from Agriculture Department investment in this area will lead to innovation in a number of different fields. Research can help farmers, ranchers and the agriculture industry as a whole better understand weather patterns, discover new ways to grow fruits and vegetables, find more efficient techniques to raise cattle and even gain a better understanding of R&D’s impact on the broader economy. The current version of the proposed farm bill continues to authorize funding to USDA for items such as traditional programs for institutions of higher learning, as well as a number of smaller, but still highly important, research programs. Luckily, instead of relying on the whims of Congress to pass a favorable farm bill, there is a much better option for those

looking to refocus their R&D efforts. As an owner or practitioner within the agriculture industry, there are countless numbers of activities that a company may already be doing that could qualify for a generous, but highly underutilized, research and development tax credit. The R&D tax credit was implemented in the 1980s to battle an economic slowdown, but over time the credit has evolved and been expanded for the benefit of numerous industries — including the broader agriculture sector. Due to gradual regulatory changes over the past two decades, the R&D credit can be applied not only to activities that are purposefully innovative and progressive, but also to many activities that farmers, ranchers and producers perform on an everyday basis. This includes common activities such as:

- Hybridization or development of new strains of crops, plants or livestock.
- Experimentation with new or different fertilizers.
- Development and implementation of new ways to protect crops from disease.
- Development of new irrigation systems.
- Valuation and implementation of new techniques to increase yields.
- Improvements in harvesting equipment, techniques or cycle times.

If a business performs any of the above activities — or other activities designed to improve agricultural products, processes or techniques — that company likely qualifies for substantial tax savings. For example, a dairy company undertook several projects to develop new electrical components to be used in conjunction with the company’s line of cattle cooling products. This company received more than \$163,000 in federal and state credits due to R&D tax incentives. Whether through incentives such as the R&D credit, or improvements within new legislation, it is clear that one way to create success in the agriculture industry is through concerted research & development efforts. With or without the farm bill, the R&D tax credit will remain one of the best opportunities for agribusinesses to stay competitive. Mike Johanns was the U.S. agriculture secretary from 2005 to 2007, governor of Nebraska from 1999 to 2005 and a U.S. senator representing Nebraska from 2009 to 2015. Courtesy of the American Farm Bureau Federation.