

# Activists swarm Capitol in support of climate bill

By **SAM STITES**  
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Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Activists seeking to clean Oregon’s environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions turned out by the hundreds at state Capitol Tuesday, pushing legislators to move ahead with a cap-and-trade policy.

Demonstrators ranged from Salem-area teenagers who took time out from school to middle-aged Wasco County residents.

All told, organizers say that more than 1,000 people travelled to the Capitol to support Senate Bill 1530, which aims to cap and shrink the state’s carbon emissions and generate revenue for environmental projects.

One of those local teens was Angeline Prater, 17, of Salem, who spoke to the crowd Tuesday about her activism.

In an interview, she said that her parents, immigrants from

Mexico who work in agriculture, were already feeling the effects of climate change — extreme temperatures in winter and summer.

She said she first heard about the proposal from friends in school and then got involved in activism.

“I’m here today to fight for the climate crisis and to, you know, push our legislators to fight for strong climate legislation,” Prater said, adding that legislation was the most important part of “solving the climate crisis.”

The pending legislation would establish a new limit on certain emissions and reduce them over time.

The limits would apply to certain industries and major fuel importers. The cap-and-trade policy would carve up the emissions limit into allowances that emitters can buy and sell on a market. The idea is that as emissions targets get lower, fewer allowances are available, and industry would improve



Sam Stites/Oregon Capital Bureau

**Activists pack the steps of the Oregon State Capitol on Tuesday, Feb. 11, to show support for a cap and trade bill being considered by lawmakers.**

pollution controls.

Opponents have criticized the plan for its potential impact on consumers and small businesses, particularly through higher fuel costs. Recent revisions to the legislation spare counties east of the Cascades from regulations on fuel importers and provide a way for natural gas companies to guard their low-income customers against higher costs.

The event began at noon with speeches on the Capitol

steps from activists and political officials, including remarks from Multnomah County Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson, Milwaukie Mayor and congressional candidate Mark Gamba and Eric Richardson, Eugene-Springfield NAACP president. Following speeches, the demonstrators marched around the Capitol chanting and waving signs with messages supporting the climate legislation.

The event, organized by the

environmental group Renew Oregon, was a counterpoint to a protest in Salem last week organized by Timber Unity.

Activists made the trek to Salem from all parts of the state Tuesday, including Dean Myerson, who was part of a carload of demonstrators who drove three hours from The Dalles.

Myerson said he believes Oregon needs to lead the way on climate action.

“We can’t just wait for everybody else to do something first, which seems to be one of the arguments. ‘We can’t do this alone,’ which is true, but somebody has to start,” Myerson said. “In Wasco County we had a series of really bad fires a couple years ago. A lot of historic homes were destroyed, a farmer died. ... There’s always been fires, but climate change is making them worse.”

Maia Stout, a 15-year-old from coastal Yachats, explained to the crowd what climate action means to her. For the

past several months, Stout — like 17-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg — has participated in the global youth climate strike, standing outside her high school in Newport every Friday to bring attention to the issue.

“I advocate for climate action because I understand that the mistakes we’ve made don’t fix themselves,” Stout said. “I raised my voice because I can’t vote for three more years and time is running out.”

Coral Avery, 22, a student at Oregon State University, is an enrolled member of the Shawnee tribe of Oklahoma.

“Climate and natural resource use really goes back to indigenous people,” Avery said. “That’s the main reason why I’m here today, is to represent, the best I can, represent my community and other indigenous communities who have overall been left out of the conversation or at least haven’t been centered in it before.”

## Washington Farm Bureau joins hands with climate-action group

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington farm and environmental groups have agreed on legislation to fund on-farm projects that reduce carbon emissions.

Washington Farm Bureau initially opposed it but now supports the reworked measure. It is the brainchild of Carbon Washington, a Seattle-based climate-action group that envisions a carbon-free future.

Carbon Washington’s original proposal has been stripped of implied criticism of agriculture’s reliance on fossil fuels. Left in place are grants to farmers for planting trees, growing cover crops, buying lower-emission tractors and taking other steps to store more or release less greenhouse gases.

“That language represents a year-long discussion among a broad stakeholder group,” Farm Bureau government relations director Tom Davis said Friday. “The conversation didn’t start well. There was a lot of finger pointing and rock throwing.”

The Senate has already passed a version of Senate Bill 5947. The Farm Bureau said it was too complicated and passed without enough consultation with farm groups. The bill is now in the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

The Farm Bureau and Carbon Washington are backing a rewrite that deletes references to farmers and ranchers cutting their consumption of fossil fuels to reduce “local and global pollution.” Among the groups supporting the rewrite are the Washington State Dairy Federation and The Nature Conservancy.

At a hearing Friday in front of the House agriculture committee, Columbia Basin farmer Jim Baird testified in support of the bill. Outside the hearing room, Baird said financial support could encourage farmers to plant cover crops—a favorite subject of his, he said.

“People see me coming and say, ‘Here comes Mr. Cover Crop,’” Baird said. “I personally like the bill because I believe it will be the first step in farmers getting paid for healthier farming practices that sequester carbon.”

Farm groups are not unanimously behind creating a new program. Agriculture lobbyist Jim Jesernig—representing state potato, onion and grain associations—said the reworked bill was fine, but that current conservation district programs already are underfunded.

Lawmakers shouldn’t create a new program unless they’re willing to spend the money, he said. “If it’s just empty rhetoric, don’t pass it.”

A recent analysis by the Washington State Conservation Commission concluded the state’s 45 conservation districts need another \$17 million to meet the on-the-ground demand from landowners for technical assistance. Heather

Hansen, representing the Washington Farm Forestry Association, said legislators could do more to reduce carbon emissions by increasing support for a program to help small-forest landowners grow trees.

“I can’t support a new program that would siphon funds from existing programs,” she said.

Carbon Washington policy chairman Greg Rock said he also doesn’t want money diverted from what conservation districts are doing now.

The organization will seek a one-year, \$1 million appropriation from lawmakers for a new carbon-reduction program while also advocating for more money for existing conservation district programs, he said.

A new program focused on climate change could raise overall support for conservation districts among urban legislators, he said.

## Protest: Groups of protesters visited legislators’ offices

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would eliminate 43.4 million metric tons of carbon annually from the atmosphere.

Critics, however, point out that amount represents just 0.12% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Advocates say every bit counts.

Estimates provided by the nonpartisan Legislative Revenue Office estimated the program would raise prices by 22 cents per gallon in the first year of the program, according to state Sen. Bill Hansell.

Inside the building, protesters did not go unnoticed.

Swarms of protesters visited legislators’ offices. Truck horns echoed even inside hearing rooms.

Brian Iverson, the husband of state Rep. Vikki Iverson, R-Powell Butte, said his wife described being inside the Capitol before protesters streamed in as the calm before the storm, with subdued tension, excitement and angst.

At 9 a.m., Gov. Kate Brown met with 10 Timber Unity leaders as part of her continued effort to speak with rural stakeholders.

The meeting was closed to the press, but former legislator Julie Parrish, now a Timber Unity member, said the meeting with Brown and her policy advisers was “genial.”

The governor, she said, listened to protesters’ concerns but made no commitments on bill alterations yet.

Parrish brought her own proposals to deal with climate change without hurting rural jobs.

“Taxing the behavior of pollution will not reduce pollution,” said Parrish. “We can do better. We need other solutions.”

In front of the Capitol, Jeff Leavy, one of Timber Unity’s founders, told the crowd that the movement has grown into something larger than just about fighting one bill. He said it’s now about challenging overregulation, getting citizens engaged with government and trying to have a voice in the legislative process.

“A legislator inside said you guys are shutting down the legislature and not letting people’s voices be heard,” said Sen. Denyc Boles, R-Salem. Surveying the crowd, she added, “I’d say this is the legislative process. We can hear the people’s voices.”

Sen. Herman Baertschiger Jr., R-Grants Pass, urged the crowd to continue on its mission.

“Now you must build an army to defeat those in this building who want to take away your way of life. It’s a fight for freedom. It’s so much bigger than one bill,” he said, adding that “it’s now about all kinds of freedom: religious freedom, gun rights, the freedom not to be overtaxed.”

Timber Unity is a heterogeneous group: Some members believe climate



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

**Timber Unity supporters greet the convoy of trucks as it arrives Feb. 6 at the Oregon Capitol. Traffic on Interstate 5 was backed up as the big rigs arrived in Salem from all directions.**

change is a real issue and others don’t. What they agree on is that hurting rural Oregon businesses is not OK.

Timber Unity invited scientists, called “skeptics” by some and “climate deniers” by others, to speak.

“The whole concept behind this bill is a big fraud,” said meteorologist Chuck Wiese. “If you really want this, I would say to the legislators, put it to a vote. But they know if they do, folks like you with common sense are gonna shut it down.”

“We’re not having a climate crisis,” added environmental scientist Bob Zybach. “We’re having a government crisis.”



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