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Opinion

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Our View

U.S. needs a realistic oil and gas policy

President Biden has blamed the Russian invasion of Ukraine for rising fuel prices. But figures show prices have been on the rise for more than a year. The invasion and the ensuing bans on Russian crude have only made the situation worse.

The price and supply volatility suggest that the United States needs to revisit its policies towards the domestic gas and oil industry even as the country works to transition to alternative energy sources.

A year ago, the spot price for a barrel of West Texas Intermediate — a benchmark crude oil — was \$62.29 a barrel and the average price of a gallon of gas in Oregon and Washington was \$2.89.

As post-COVID demand outstripped supply, oil prices rose to \$91.70 a barrel on Feb. 18, the last day of trading before the invasion.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the average retail price of regular gas in Oregon and Wash-



Mark Duncan/Associated Press File

An oil well pump in the middle of an Ohio soybean field. President Biden now wants to increase domestic oil production.

ington was \$4.32 a gallon on March 7, up 46 cents from the week before and \$1.43 over the year before.

The average retail price of on-road diesel in Oregon and Washington was \$4.978 a gallon on March 7, up 68 cents from the week before and \$1.75 over

the year before.

The United States is still a net exporter of petroleum, pumping 11.6 million barrels a day, and the Energy Department forecasts that production will increase by another million barrels by the end of the year.

The alternatives are expensive, even with subsidies. Proponents favor pricing fossil fuels out of the market and forcing consumers to make the transition. That requires regulatory and policy measures that limit oil and gas production.

For the most part, the administration is favorable to that strategy. Throughout the campaign, candidate Biden said he'd "get rid of fossil fuels." While he has yet to succeed, his policies have made permitting and production more difficult.

But now the president wants oil companies to start pumping to bring down gas prices, as if a spigot can be turned on. It takes a year or more to get a well drilled and producing, and oil companies make

expansion plans based on long-term financial forecasts.

Why would oil companies plan to expand production during an administration that's committed to getting rid of fossil fuels?

We have no animus towards alternative energy sources, at least those that don't impact productive farmland. But we live in the real world where the needs of everyday life cannot yet be met by wind, solar panels and batteries. Trucks, tractors, combines, tanks and fighter jets are still powered by fossil fuels.

It's possible that one day our personal and commercial lives won't be powered by fossil fuels, but that day isn't today, it won't be tomorrow, nor probably any day in the next decade or more.

Until that day arrives, it only makes sense that U.S. policy facilitates enough oil and natural gas to ensure our commercial and strategic energy needs are met.

Cloud seeding can aid collaborative efforts to restore Idaho's salmon runs

I've always been amazed at what can be accomplished by working together. Now is the time to collaborate with our downstream states to restore the salmon runs in the Snake River Basin.

My entire 30-year career as Idaho's Water Supply Specialist included discussions, projects and success stories about recovering salmon and steelhead. Some \$17 billion spent over 30 years in the Columbia Basin has prevented these species from going extinct, but has not restored them to sustainable numbers.

The coordination and management of the Columbia Basin's water is amazing. I've seen first-hand numerous agencies working together to manage our water supplies. Did you know that Brownlee Dam in the Hells Canyon Complex and Dworshak Reservoir provide flood control to cities along the Columbia River in Washington and Oregon, including Portland?

Success stories include Idaho Power's Collaborative Cloud Seeding Program in the middle and upper Snake basins and Idaho's Managed Recharge Program that diverts excess water into the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer to help stabilize groundwater levels.

Much has been learned to master the art of cloud seeding that increases snow water equiv-

GUEST VIEW

Ron Abramovich



which would help offset power loss from removing the Snake River dams.

The four lower Snake River dams have outlived their life. The dams' primary purpose was to provide an Idaho shipping port and hydropower. These accomplishments came with costs. These dams slowed the Snake River to a crawl in this 140-mile section, creating miles of warm water that drastically impacted Idaho's salmon and steelhead migration to the ocean and back.

Today, we are at critical crossroads because of the low number of fish returning to Idaho. It's time to work together with our downstream neighbors to restore this river section to a free flowing river, and explore cloud seeding opportunities that benefit fish, irrigators and power producers.

If you have ever seen these fish in the wild darting under your raft, jumping up Dagger Falls on the Middle Fork Salmon River, or had one tug the end of your line, then you understand the thrill of salmon in the wild.

Ron Abramovich was the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Idaho Water Supply Specialist from 1991 to 2019 providing snow and water supply information to farmers, recreationists and industries that depend on Idaho's winter snowfall.

alent by 7-15%. Melting of this snow provides an additional 1 million acre-feet of water annually to be put to use. Success of this cloud seeding program is supported by the Idaho State Legislature's recent bill to support additional cloud seeding opportunities.

Cloud seeding opportunities in the Salmon and Clearwater basins should be investigated to help irrigators and benefit salmon. Successful cloud seeding to produce more water will allow water managers the ability to better shape the hydrograph for salmon flows. This may reduce the need for some flow augmentation water from upper Snake reservoirs. Cold snowmelt water from the Clearwater River headwaters will keep river temperatures cooler longer and may reduce or delay the need for Dworshak water to cool downstream river temperatures. This may also allow Dworshak water levels to remain full longer in the summer, as was promised when the dam was built.

The additional snowmelt water would also generate hydropower at Dworshak and the lower Columbia River dams,

READERS' VIEW

Editor's Note: The following letter was addressed to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

Why Governor Brown should veto the ag overtime bill

Dear Governor Brown: We, the undersigned agricultural coalition members, formally ask you to veto House Bill 4002B. The bill is bad policy for both farm families and farm employees and it is the result of a very bad process. We ask you to veto this bill before it does irreparable harm to all who depend on the ag community.

Ag producers engaged in every workgroup and process in good faith throughout the last year. They brought solutions to the table that addressed every policy objective labor advocates identified. One example is the -10 amendments, which would have taken away tax credits from farmers and used the funds instead for direct payments to farm employees.

There are several similar examples of where ag producers attempted to find consensus. Please note that no signer on this letter opposed reaching a workable bill to grant overtime pay to ag employees in this process.

The legislature is aware and

acknowledges that the nominal tax credits in the bill are inadequately funded and ineffective in their design. These temporary credits will be delayed and incomplete, and they are subject to being taken away any time future legislatures meet.

Additionally, they are lowest when overtime costs are highest. Ag families have repeatedly testified and steadfastly maintained that these credits are not workable.

Labor advocates refused to negotiate in any substantive way this session or the lead-up to it and they actively blew up negotiations last fall by filing a lawsuit and walking away. This is not the path to a solution that maximizes benefits to some while minimizing harm to others. It is not The Oregon Way.

Ideally, a veto would cause the legislature to go back and get this important issue right. However, we know if you veto the bill, the BOLI commissioner has indicated she will initiate rulemaking on this subject. We would rather risk a bad outcome in an evidence- and law-based process at BOLI than watch this bad bill deal the fatal blow to our community.

The threats posed by this bill are well documented in hours of farmer testimony from committee hearings and the floor speeches of rural legislators. Solutions that meet the stated needs of labor advocates are

readily at hand. This does not have to be a zero-sum activity. Legislators heard that their bill accelerates corporatization of agriculture in Oregon, pushes families off the farm, and incentivizes increased out-of-state ownership of farm and ranch ground while reducing earning potential for farm employees and eliminating jobs. They ignored these certain outcomes.

We ask you to not turn your back on farm and ranch families at this pivotal moment.

If the goal is benefitting farm employees while not ignoring the existential needs of the farm and ranch families who employ them, the only option is to veto this bill.

Respectfully signed:
Oregon Farm Bureau
Oregon Association of Nurseries
Oregonians for Food and Shelter
Oregon Seed Council
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
National Federation of Independent Business
Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers
Associated Oregon Hazelnut Industries
Oregon Wheat Growers League
Farwest Agriculture Association
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
Oregon State Chamber of Commerce

Bold initiatives for the future of agriculture

GUEST VIEW

Jon Wyss and Matt Gellings

Idaho and Washington state have a few things in common. The Snake River flows through both states to provide water the farmers and ranchers need, and they grow some of the same commodities. Both states have farmers and ranchers that are good stewards of the land.

USDA shares a similar concern of many within agriculture and this great nation — the negative impacts of greenhouse gases and the agriculture industry's ability to reduce the nation's carbon footprint.

USDA and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) are ready and willing to work with farmers and ranchers to establish goals of mitigating or eliminating the potential negative impacts to agricultural operations in respect to climate change.

Agriculture is responsible for an estimated 10% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. President Biden's proposed Build Back Better bill includes \$28 billion for climate mitigation, headlined by a plan to encourage planting of additional cover crops, the promotion of forestry and agricultural conservation, resilience and wildfire risk mitigation, and additionally allows for specialty crops to be considered as part of the carbon sequestration credits.

President Biden also supports Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodity Funding opportunities. Climate-Smart commodities include any agriculture commodity that is produced using agricultural (farming, ranching, forestry) practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or sequester carbon. Commodities broadly include many different crops that impact Washington and Idaho, such as: fruits, vegetables, grains, oilseeds, livestock, dairy, forage crops, timber, forestry products, specialty crops, organic crops and indigenous crops.

All of these programs supported by President Biden and the Build Back Better bill will provide economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers in Idaho and Washington for generations to come allowing opportunities for new young farmers and ranchers and generational family farms to lead into the next generation with a reduced carbon footprint.

Many farm kids have decided to not come back to the family farm. This is a trend that we need to reverse.

While watching the President's State of the Union with our children and grandchildren we could see a path forward to opportunity for kids to return to the family farms bringing new ideas, technology and investment in new initiatives to ensure success.

President Biden's State of the Union address is a reminder to all of us that equity is a significant focus for this President. This administration is growing an economy from the bottom up and the

middle out. Not top down.

The economy has achieved its fastest job growth in American history. Biden's presidency is about giving everyone a fair shot, because when given a fair shot, ordinary people can do extraordinary things. Anyone listening should find comfort in the message that our best days lie ahead.

An example of a positive step in the right direction is that March 1 marked the first public meeting of the USDA Equity Commission. The commission was created to identify USDA programs and policies that have contributed to institutional racism. Members of the commission are tasked with preventing future wrongs.

As public servants and USDA appointees in prior capacities and administrations, we have witnessed many changes at USDA. Not changes to federal farm programs but changes nationally and in both Idaho and Washington state.

Change is inherent in FSA's business model — it's who we are as an agency. Programs change as Congress enacts and we deliver new farm policy or when we respond to natural disasters and pandemics.

Administrations change. We are proud to serve the Biden-Harris administration. The Farm Service Agency is the only government agency that has a "grassroots voice" in how federal farm policy is administered. Since its inception, FSA programs have been locally led, through producer-elected county committees, which enable input from farmers and ranchers on delivery of the agency's critical programs. The FSA State Committee continues that voice and is vital to FSA's mission.

FSA traces its roots back to the Great Depression, when the Farm Security Administration was created to help American farmers amid a very challenging time. While FSA's mission has expanded over the years, its commitment to helping farmers and ranchers has not changed.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways, and under Secretary Vilsack's leadership and the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is empowering people and improving lives. We should thank our farmers "three times a day."

USDA was established by President Lincoln on May 15, 1862, during the Civil War. He called it "The People's Department." This administration is proving it truly is!

Jon Wyss is the Washington state Farm Service Agency executive director, and Matt Gellings is the Idaho state Farm Service Agency executive director.