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Opinion

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Our View

Private enterprise shines in climate efforts

Not to be critical of government, but if you want something done, you're usually best off looking to private enterprise.

It's not that government can't do it, it's just that government too often gets in the way of itself — and everyone else.

Take, for example, efforts to slow climate change. At the state and federal levels, a hodgepodge of climate programs has emerged over the years. Most are aimed at jacking up oil and gas prices.

By doing that, they are supercharging inflation, which is now 7.9%, the highest it's been since 1982.

The federal government has been particularly inept in its climate efforts. It has subsidized "green" companies such as Tesla, which in turn has built factories overseas, including China, the biggest climate polluter on the planet. That country produces 30% of the world's carbon dioxide and continues to add to its fleet of 1,110 coal-fired power generation plants to run all of those Chinese-built Teslas.

By comparison, India operates the second-largest number of coal-fired plants, 285.

In the meantime, the federal government has also discouraged domestic oil and natural gas production while going to countries such as Venezuela, Iran and Saudi Arabia looking for more oil.

In Oregon, the unelected bureau-



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

The Organic Valley Cooperative has a new climate effort that will pay member farmers to sequester or prevent carbon dioxide and methane from entering the atmosphere.

crats in the Department of Environment Quality are doing an end-run around the legislature with their "Climate Protection Program."

In Washington, the Department of Ecology is aiming at forcing refineries to reduce their greenhouse gases by 28% in four years.

That means consumers and businesses — you — will ultimately be saddled with higher gasoline and diesel prices.

The carbon footprints of Oregon and Washington are minuscule compared to those of China, India and Russia, or even California. What we in the

Northwest do to slow climate change matters, but not very much. Washington produces about 0.19% of global carbon emissions, while Oregon produces about 0.17%. That's according to each state and the Our World in Data website.

With that in mind, we were greatly interested in a new private enterprise effort that appears to have all of the trappings of success. Organic Valley, a cooperative of organic dairy farmers, last month announced its Carbon Insetting Program as a means of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

This program is the essence of simplicity. Instead setting up some confus-

ing government-style effort that requires a battalion of new employees, Organic Valley will pay co-op members for reducing their carbon footprint. More efficient lighting and coolers, installing solar panels, planting trees and better manure management are among the activities that will reduce or offset carbon dioxide and methane production.

The efforts will be certified by a third party, SustainCERT, to determine the impacts.

In return, the farmers will receive the market rate, about \$15, for every metric ton of carbon that is either sequestered or otherwise prevented from entering the atmosphere.

Others in agriculture are developing efforts that will similarly reduce their impact on the climate.

They all have several characteristics in common. They are simple, meaningful and effective.

Those are three characteristics generally missing from government climate efforts.

A suggestion: Maybe the government should stick to encouraging private enterprise to reduce its carbon footprint instead of pushing programs that will cost consumers, businesses, farmers and ranchers.

Our confidence is in private enterprise. If government wants to help, that's fine. It just shouldn't get in the way.

Inslee is unaware of his broken relationship with Washington ag

It is not often Gov. Jay Inslee directly addresses Washington's agricultural community. Recently, Capital Press ran a cover story featuring our governor doing just that.

The interview revealed how out of touch Gov. Inslee has become with the farmers and ranchers of our state and, yet, how certain he is of his own ability to maintain a relationship with that same community.

When asked how he would "characterize his relationship" with the agricultural community, the governor responded, "Maybe it's a little easier for me to do that than others, because I spent two decades in Selah, trying to set my little irrigation box to just the right amount of water to water my hay field, surrounded by orchardists and people in the ag industry. So I think it's a little easier for me to have that relationship. ..."

It is an odd statement from a governor who celebrated passage of new overtime pay requirements at the end of the last legislative session, brought maggot infested apples into a quarantine area after the horrific fires of last year, and surprised farmers with legislation that would have devastated the agricultural community by requiring farmers to set aside large stream buffers without compensation.

Washington state's flagrant disregard for its farmers and ranchers starts from the top down.

Last year's overtime pay law, touted as promoting fair wages for farmworkers, will very likely shortchange those very farmworkers the governor purportedly supports. Our state already pays some of the highest farmworker wages in the country — an estimated average of \$18/hour — and adding a time-and-a-half requirement after 40 hours in 2024, will force employers to reduce that hourly rate to minimum wage and limit hours worked, thus decreasing the overall take-home wage for farmworkers.

After wildfire ravaged the city of

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Pam Lewison



Malden last summer, the governor thoughtlessly broke apple maggot quarantine rules by bringing apples from trees at the Governor's Mansion in Olympia to survivors of the fire. Apple maggots are a highly invasive pest that burrow into the soil, lay eggs, and once established, cannot be eradicated. Few parts of Eastern Washington remain apple maggot free, and signs are prominently posted on our roadways indicating a prohibition on transporting fruit into a quarantine zone. A rule a life-long Washingtonian connected to the agricultural community should be aware of.

This year's legislative session posed its own challenges to the notion the governor is connected to the farm and ranch community. The introduction of HB 1838, a bill filed at the request of the governor, proposed to expand riparian buffers to as much as 249 feet from the high-water mark of 100-year floodplains throughout the entire state. It was dubbed by many as a "farm killer" and for good reason. In Whatcom and Skagit counties, where lowland farms were only just drying out after winter flooding, the fear of losing generational farms was all too real. Fortunately, the bill died in committee.

Later in the interview, the governor was asked what his response would be to critics who say his policies and regulations are making farming more difficult.

"Well, I'd have to know what people are referring to," Gov. Inslee said. Anyone with a relationship to farmers and ranchers would already know.

Pam Lewison is agriculture research director for the Washington Policy Center.

Cultivating the leaders of tomorrow

Violence broke out, people were arrested, some were beaten, shots were fired, vehicles were damaged, a bridge was burned. This could be the news from last week, but I want to take you back to Washington's "Fish Wars" of the 1960s and 1970s.

Sport and commercial fishing industries were competing with Native American tribes. The lawsuit that followed redefined the roles of tribes in natural resource management in the Pacific Northwest, leading eventually to the Timber/Fish/Wildlife Agreement (TFW), which was signed in the early 1980s as a new way to manage natural resources with tribes, loggers, environmentalists and agencies working together on practices.

Credit for TFW is given to two strong leaders: Billy Frank Jr., a Nisqually tribal leader, and Stu Bledsoe, an Ellensburg rancher turned politician. What these two men accomplished with TFW showed all natural resource industries, including agriculture, the need for and value of aggressively pursuing their needs and explaining them to the public — especially as it related to public policy.

As he worked on TFW, Bledsoe also drove the first efforts to build a natural resources leadership program in Washington state, patterned after other state programs.

Leadership. Some will say, "I know it when I see it." What if you didn't have to wait to stumble upon someone with leadership skills? What if you could build leaders? Take raw talent and allow that talent to grow, to bloom, to excel? Would you be interested?

Now in its 45th year, the AgForestry Leadership Program has graduated over 1,000 leaders in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Leaders that help advance their industries through understanding, education and empowerment. Leaders who understand and navigate issues in the public policy arena.

The program spans 18 months with 11 multi-day seminars, plus a week in Washington, D.C., and two weeks in a foreign country. The seminars build leadership skills but also group dynamics and public speaking; working with the media; social issues; state and federal government; forestry issues and agriculture issues; transportation; the Columbia River system; and crime and corrections.

But the AgForestry program of 1977 will not be effective in 2027.

To continue intentional impact and deliver adult leadership development through training, programming and experiential learning, well, one needs to look to the future: a future with Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z — then comes Generation Alpha! It is already clear that the target audience of tomorrow is different and has very different values, learning styles and expectations. AgForestry needs to evaluate and retrofit to ensure its leadership program remains relevant, attracts high-quality candidates, makes an impact with graduates and continues to res-

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Vicky Scharlau



onate with grantors, alumni, contributors and stakeholders.

I am a graduate of Class 10 and was barely 30 years old at the time. AgForestry changed my life and my professional trajectory and taught me much, most importantly to help others find their voice and facilitate the "process" toward public policy. A process that is often like watching paint dry, but necessary, needed and often long overdue. I found I could make a difference by not being the loudest voice in the room.

If you look closely, you can spot an AgForestry graduate. And if you know a recent graduate, you are no doubt amazed and impressed with the transformation that occurred before your eyes. Graduates emerge as different people. As they should, after a highly competitive selection process, seminars covering 18 months, and at least 58 days of required time and attendance. Astonishingly, the cost to a participant is just \$6,000. The actual cost is over \$40,000 — offset by contributions from grants, alumni and other stakeholders who value leadership. The total investment in each class is \$750,000.

The Agriculture and Forestry Education Foundation, which oversees the AgForestry Leadership Program, looks for production candidates — key or up-and-coming decision-makers from farming, forestry, fishing or natural resource entities or who spend their time in hands-on activities. Agriculture, forestry and natural resources include producers (farmer, forester and fisher), processor/shippers, and marketing/salespeople. It also includes education, law, finance, insurance and government agencies who serve the natural resources sector. Those in fields such as the environment, media, research, labor and public relations who demonstrate strong connections to natural resource industries are also considered.

Applications for Class 44 will be accepted until April 30. The first seminar is set to start in October at Washington State University. To learn more, there are Q&A sessions on Wednesday, April 6 at 10–11 a.m. and the last one is on April 18 at 1–2 p.m.

To learn more or to start the application process, go to: agforestry.org/prospects.

To invest in future leaders, go to: agforestry.org/donate.

We cultivate leaders.

Vicky Scharlau (Class 10) is the interim executive director of the Agriculture and Forestry Education Foundation.

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