

Digging into Cap-and-Trade *continued from front page*

health and well being of Oregonians, and ensure Oregon's economy remains vibrant. In 2010, the Commission launched "Roadmap to 2020," designed to meet its 2020 greenhouse gas reduction goals. According to the Commission Oregon's current levels of greenhouse gas emissions are well above the State's 2020 goal. Projected emissions under current policies does not put Oregon on a path toward achieving its long-term 2050 goals. The Commission's goals, along with membership in the Under2 Coalition, were the driving forces behind HB 2020.

Following the failure of HB 2020 Governor Brown said she and other Democrats across the state had been elected in 2018 with a "clear mandate" to address climate change. "Let me be clear, I am not backing down," she said.

The impacts on energy costs

For part two of this series I spoke with Oregon State Senator Betsy Johnson, a Democrat, whose opposition to HB 2020 helped sink it in the Senate. Johnson referred me to the research and opinions of Greg Peterson, a professional engineer from Corvallis, with 45 years experience in government infrastructure and energy systems. "I'm all for reducing our carbon footprint, but the U.S. is already leading the world in GHG reduction, by using more efficient vehicles, conservation, and converting to natural gas power plants," says Peterson. "HB 2020's goal of reducing 1990 greenhouse gases by 80% is double that needed to make Oregon carbon neutral."

Peterson did his own extensive work, analyzing HB 2020 in great depth, including its impacts on energy systems and costs, and how it would impact Oregonians use of motor vehicles. Peterson found many flaws in HB 2020. He had a lot to say about its lack of detail, erroneous assumptions, and the negative impacts it would have had on rural communities. Among Peterson's findings:

- An estimate of the cumulative financial costs to move all Oregonians out of their current vehicles and into alternative fuel vehicles (AFV), a key component of HB 2020 in meeting the 2050 goals, shows there are many unknowns: which AFV type will be supported, questions about potential battery capacity increases, how we will recharge AFVs, and the lack of viable offerings of SUVs, vans, pickups, buses, and truck models.
- The extra transportation cost to those urbanites who don't travel much, will likely be lower than average, but they

will see a significant rise in natural gas and electricity cost. However, the worst burden will be on rural communities, who drive long distances and haul heavy loads every day.

- Transitioning to a lower carbon footprint will involve expensive and largely unproven technologies, that by their very nature, carry a high risk of failure. Assumptions in the plan are unrealistically optimistic, especially regarding the cost and use of alternative energy.
- A cost estimate for decarbonizing natural gas or the electrical grid shows there are many technical details omitted that will significantly drive up costs when implemented. Estimated costs are sometimes vague and too optimistic.
- The plan for the electrical grid assumes ever-declining cost of wind, photovoltaic (PV), and EV batteries, which may or may not happen. However, since mega-scale solar and wind renewable production is dispersed and intermediate, they can't operate alone. Dispersed alternative energy sources will be spread out over a very large landscape and require new transmission lines and other infrastructure.
- To date, alternative energy has been less than 7% of Oregon's grid and has been relatively easy to integrate. Increasing alternative sources to 50% or more (with the rest coming from hydro, nuclear, and biomass) will be vastly more complex and expensive. Some newer alternative energy projects use battery storage, but these are very expensive and still have limited capacity.

For another perspective I spoke with Bev Danner, Community Investment Director at Community Action Team (CAT) in St. Helens, about HB 2020 and its impacts on the communities where she works. Danner works in programs related to weatherization, housing rehabilitation, and affordable housing.

"HB 2020 is far too complex and is just a complicated and convoluted bill," said Danner. "With all the amendment and changes, it was really difficult keeping up and understanding it. From the beginning I saw some flaws."

Danner said one of the reasons she works in the weatherization business is because she has a deep concern for the environment, and says she fully recognizes the concerns about global climate change and our need to address it.

Danner says she saw what she calls "greenwashing" in HB 2020, including provisions that allow polluters to buy their way out of reforms by buying carbon credits, along with off-sets that

reduce the entire purpose of the bill.

She says she was concerned about the impacts of HB 2020 on low income populations, and especially on rural communities. "It felt like there was a very disparate impact," she said, "and that's what really got my attention."

She said HB 2020 did include provisions to provide rebates to subsidize higher fuel costs for low income populations. "I saw those, but they were cutting those off at 250% of the Federal poverty level. But what about that person who is \$5 over that limit, whose income is still going to be detrimentally impacted? In my work there is always a group of people who aren't quite classified as low income, but their incomes are very modest and they're just getting by already."

As an example, Danner points to portions of the plan that would provide incentives to move people into alternative fuel vehicles. "Low income populations can't afford electric vehicles at this point," says Danner. "They're typically driving older vehicles because that's what they can afford. People want to participate in reducing carbon emissions, but they have to be able to participate in a way where they can still survive. When we get to those low income levels that becomes a concern."

Danner said increased fuel costs built into HB 2020 would drive up the costs of almost all goods and services, and in turn, things like rent – all the things that can impact a low income household – especially for more remote communities like Vernonia.

"I really feel like they didn't look deeply enough into the unintended consequences of this," said Danner. "This was modeled after similar programs in California and the East Coast, but this is Oregon. We needed an Oregon lens on this bill and we needed to be more inclusive and look at the impacts on all the people in Oregon who live the Oregon lifestyle. This was not the Bottle Bill."

Looking forward

The Oregon Legislature's decision to not enact HB 2020 leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Several recent reports raise alarming concerns about global climate change, which portend drastic impacts to food supplies, drinking water, sea level changes and our economic future – many of those impacts arriving much more quickly than have been predicted.

Oregon Governor Brown has

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hinted that she might consider an Executive Order to implement HB 2020, although that would most likely only fuel the fires of discontent already ignited between the rural/urban divide.

Hopes for a non-partisan reworking of the bill, that might more realistically and slowly accomplish the carbon reduction goals laid out in HB 2020, while laudable, seem unlikely given Oregon's, and the nation's, current political climate.

Somewhat more encouraging seems to be the recognition by at least some of Oregonians that might have fallen into the climate change denier camp previously, that yes, in fact, climate change is real and needs to be dealt with.

Meanwhile the doom and gloom reports continue to pour in, sometimes daily.

The results of a study conducted by the University of Minnesota, with researchers from the University of Ox-

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