

Amended energy bill lowers annual caps

A state Senate committee voted 3-2 Monday to pass version

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A bill to double Oregon's renewable energy mandate is headed for a vote as soon as Wednesday in the state Senate, where it faces an uncertain fate.

The Senate Committee on Business and Transportation voted 3-2 Monday afternoon to pass an amended version of the bill out of committee. State Sen. Lee Beyer, the committee's chairman, wrote the amendment in an attempt to address concerns that the bill, which was negotiated behind closed doors by the state's two investor-owned utilities, environmental groups, the renewable energy industry and Citizens Utility Board of Oregon, will be costly to consumers and businesses.

Beyer, D-Springfield, said the amendment strengthened the role of the Public Utility Commission in response to criticism the earlier version would have weakened commission oversight.

Utilities objected to a provision in the amendment that would lower the annual cost cap for the renewable energy mandate from 4 percent to 3 percent. The existing renewable energy mandate allows utilities to ask the Public Utility Commission to approve rate increases based on costs incurred to meet the law.

"I'm not sure why changing it advances the policy now," said Scott Bolton, a vice president at PacifiCorp.

Ry Schwark, a spokesman for PacifiCorp, said he expected the bill might still undergo changes. "Since this now will likely need to go to conference, much will depend upon what comes out the other end of that process," Schwark wrote in an email.

Beyer's amendment also expanded the types of energy

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the utilities could use to meet the renewables mandate to include certain hydropower projects, biomass and power plants that burn municipal solid waste. That provision did not appear to be controversial.

Beyer was also trying to shore up support for the bill after news reports last week that Gov. Kate Brown's administration silenced state energy regulators who critiqued the bill, and that those regulators had not received enough information from the utilities to vet cost projections for the bill.

"There was lots of concerns expressed in the press and everybody else about how this bill got here and what it did and whether the regulator was left out or not," Beyer said on Monday.

Double existing mandate

House Bill 4036 would double Oregon's existing mandate to increase renewable energy and require Portland General Electric and PacifiCorp to use renewable power sources such as wind and solar to serve at least 50 percent of their customers' energy demand in Oregon by 2040, up from the current state mandate of 25 percent renewable energy by 2025.

The bill would also require the investor-owned utilities to stop using coal to serve Oregon customers, but there are questions about whether the bill would actually do much to impact the phase-out of coal power in Oregon. Portland General Electric has already

committed to close Oregon's only coal plant, in Boardman, by 2020, and Beyer said the bill would have a greater impact on the types of power utilities use to replace coal.

Beyer invited Susan Ackerman, chairwoman of the Public Utility Commission, to testify before the committee on Monday, something Senate Republicans had called for last week.

Ackerman said the Public Utility Commission had long considered a carbon cap-and-trade system to be the most efficient way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Lawmakers introduced a bill to create a cap-and-trade system this session, although it seems to have lost momentum and is currently assigned to the budget writing Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

Sap political capital

Ackerman said she was concerned that if the renewable mandate bill passes, it could use up the political capital that would be necessary to pass cap-and-trade legislation.

Ackerman also used her testimony Monday to respond to a news report that Brown's administration had muzzled the Public Utility Commission.

"That is simply not the case," Ackerman said.

Emails released by the Public Utility Commission showed Brown's staff instructed the agency earlier this year not to go public with talking points they had prepared listing concerns about the bill, specifically that it would be expensive to consumers but do little to reduce carbon emissions.

PacifiCorp has estimated the increased renewable energy mandate would cause its rates to increase by less than 1 percent annually, although critics have noted that estimate only went through 2030. Portland General Electric projected the bill's costs through 2040 and estimated the legislation would cause rates to rise by an average of 1.5 percent annually.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Gun control bill heads to state Senate

By KRISTENA HANSEN
Associated Press

SALEM — A contentious proposal to extend the waiting period on gun purchases from three to 10 days to allow more time for background checks to clear has passed its first major hurdle in the state Legislature.

The controversy playing out in Oregon over House Bill 4147, which now heads to the state Senate after passing the House on Monday, speaks to the broader debate about gun control among policymakers in the wake of numerous mass shootings across the nation in recent years.

Initially, lawmakers sought to use HB 4147 as a vehicle for closing the so-called "Charleston loophole." The phrase refers to a man accused of shooting people in a South Carolina

church in 2015 who was able to purchase a weapon after the three-day waiting period while his background check was pending.

The vast majority of background checks are completed right away, allowing many gun purchases to clear on the same day. Under current Oregon law, in those more rare instances where background checks take longer than three days, it's up to the sellers' discretion to sell the gun.

Lawmakers aimed to close that loophole by requiring background checks to clear before guns can be purchased, regardless of the length of time. But after weeks of heated debate and testimony from gun rights advocates, HB 4147 was scaled back to simply extend the waiting period to 10 business days, following similar wait times in

Hawaii, California and Washington, D.C.

"It doesn't close the loophole, but it makes it tight enough to catch a few more people who might exploit it ... It changes little for lawful purchasers, but it makes it a little harder for an unlawful purchaser to obtain a weapon," state Rep. Lew Frederick, a Democrat from Portland, said before casting his 'yes' vote Monday. "Our thoughts and prayers are cold comfort when innocent lives are taken by someone with no business having access to a weapon. Our communities need help preventing the next tragedy."

The House was supposed to cast that vote Friday — when former Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot in the head in a 2011 shooting in Tucson, Arizona, visited Portland to launch

an anti-gun violence coalition. However, the vote was delayed amid concerns the bill didn't have support from Democrats, who control the chamber.

When the decision came down Monday, HB 4147 squeaked by on a 31-28 vote, a narrow approval for the majority party after three Democrats sided with the Republican minority in opposing the bill.

"Everyone wants to stop violence," said Rep. Sherrie Sprenger, a Republican from Scio and a former sheriff's deputy. "Sometimes in the process and gut-wrenching drive to solve a terrible, terrible things, we want to bring another law ... just because we pass a law doesn't mean we're going to get the desired result."

The bill now heads to the Senate, where the lively debate will likely continue.

Knappa man killed in logging accident

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

A 47-year-old Knappa man was killed Thursday in a logging accident.

Tony Thorne was working at a logging site off of U.S. Highway 26 near Elsie when a tree crushed him, according to the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office.

"It's an extremely dangerous job," Sheriff Tom Bergin said.

Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration opened an inspection this week into the case.

Thorne was working for O'Brien Timber Felling Inc. based out of Warrenton.

Aaron Corvin, a spokes-

man for Oregon OSHA, said the inspection could take up to six months. Inspectors generally collect evidence from the scene, interview witnesses and company officials and review records and procedures. The inspection could also examine any equipment involved.

"This is standard procedure," Corvin said. "When you have a workplace death, we launch an investigation."

Elsie-Vinemaple Fire Department assisted the sheriff's office at the scene Thursday.

According to Thorne's Facebook page, he grew up in Nehalem and attended Neah-Kah-Nie High School in Rockaway Beach.

Astoria man pleads guilty to hacking celebrity emails

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — An Astoria man who accessed hundreds of email accounts and stole explicit photos of celebrities has pleaded guilty to a felony hacking charge in Los Angeles.

Andrew Helton faces up to five years in prison after pleading guilty to stealing nude or explicit photos from 13 people, including some unidentified celebrities. The plea was entered Thursday.

Hundreds of stolen nude images of stars including Jennifer Lawrence, Scarlett Johansson and Mila Kunis have been posted online in recent years.

FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller says Helton's is a separate case and that none of the images he stole are believed to have leaked online.

Helton's attorney Shannon L. Gray had no immediate comment Friday.

Prosecutors say Helton's "phishing" scheme involved sending victims emails they thought were

from Apple or Google. The messages asked victims to verify their email accounts by clicking on a link that took them to a phony website, where Helton collected their usernames and passwords.

Prosecutors say Helton used the information to access more than 360 email accounts.

Helton, 29, is scheduled to be sentenced June 2.

Hanford site cleanup may be \$107 billion

Associated Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — The latest estimate is out to complete the cleanup of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

The U.S. Department of Energy says the remaining work will cost \$107.7 billion and be largely completed by 2060.

Monday's estimate was released by the Department of Energy with its regulators, the Environmental Protection Agency and the state of Washington.

Hanford for decades made plutonium for nuclear weapons and the site is now engaged in the cleanup of the radioactive waste.

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