

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Carbon plan should be nonstarter

Oregon was a national pioneer on land use planning. It led the way with the Bottle Bill. Its protection of public beach access is legendary.

In each case, Oregonians benefited from the state's landmark legislation. That's not the case with the carbon tax-and-invest proposal being shaped by a committee of Oregon legislators.

The greenhouse gases emitted by Oregon truckers, commuters, utilities, manufacturers and other entities are so small that they are barely measurable on a global scale. Neighboring California has a huge impact, not Oregon.

Oregon officials might win environmental plaudits for taking action, but the actual atmosphere would hardly notice. In fact, there's a distinct chance Oregon could worsen the global situation.

Cap-and-invest is a market-based system in which U.S. states or Canadian provinces place caps on the amount of allowable carbon emissions. To exceed those caps, companies can buy allowances from the government. The allowances can be sold or traded on the open market, with the government investing the income in environmentally friendly projects.

California, Quebec and Ontario are the North American leaders. Key Democratic legislators in Oregon want to join them.

The catch is that Oregon's environmental initiatives already are stronger than those in many states and nations. The world, not just Oregon, loses if companies leave the state for less-restrictive locales. Or if Oregon companies switch to buying products manufactured — and shipped — under lighter regulations. Transportation is a huge contributor to greenhouse gases.

California now is the world's fifth-largest economy, larger than the United Kingdom's. That reality creates the incentive for many California corporations to invest in carbon reduction there. In contrast, Oregon's economy ranks in the middle of the pack



The Boardman Coal Plant is scheduled to close in 2020, part of the federal government's plan to reduce carbon output. Oregon is considering an additional cap-and-invest program to further limit carbon output.

among U.S. states — about the size of Egypt's and smaller than Pakistan's, Bangladesh's or Finland's.

The Legislature's Joint Interim Committee on Carbon Reduction must prioritize how cap-and-invest, or any other scheme, would alter the state's economy as well as its environment.

"What we're proposing here is a big and serious program, and I think it's legitimate to expect people to be concerned about the effects on the economy," said state Sen. Michael Dembrow, a chief architect of Oregon's cap-and-invest proposal, at a committee meeting

this summer.

Such concerns ride especially high in rural Oregon, reflecting both the Democrat-Republican and urban-rural splits on the committee.

"I can't go to cap-and-trade yet," Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, said at the same meeting. "If you listen to the testimony today, it sure seems like we're going to make rural Oregon pay the cost of all this, and I don't see urban Oregon stepping up to the plate, and that really bothers me."

Sen. Alan DeBoer, R-Ashland, has a more modest approach — a car-

bon-pollution tax, with related projects to improve forest health and reduce the destructive, carbon-emitting wildfires around the state.

"Cap-and-invest is contentious for many reasons, but a broader discussion about sunseting a carbon tax may be a better way to solving one of the most quarrelsome arguments in Salem," he said in a constituent letter last month.

Gov. Kate Brown and other key Democrats are eager for the committee to act.

But there should be no rush. Do what is best for Oregon — all of Oregon.

OTHER VIEWS

Excerpts from editorials in Oregon newspapers

Baker City Herald, on sanctuary law repeal being sensible

We think Oregon voters should repeal the state's 31-year-old "sanctuary" statute by approving Ballot Measure 105 on the Nov. 6 ballot.

That said, we're not bothered by Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash's decision to not join 16 of his 35 counterparts who signed a letter that urges voters to pass Measure 105. The letter was written by Clatsop County Sheriff Thomas J. Bergin.

In a written statement, Ash said he declined to sign Bergin's letter because Bergin cited as an example the recent murder of Mollie Tibbetts in Iowa. The man charged with her murder apparently is a Mexican national living illegally in the U.S.

"I didn't agree with using the Mollie Tibbetts family's personal tragedy for political purposes," Ash wrote, "especially without knowing how they felt about it."

It seems that Tibbetts' father, Rob, would not think much of Bergin's letter. Rob Tibbetts, while giving his daughter's eulogy, said "the Hispanic community are Iowans. They have the same values as Iowans."

Ash didn't take a position on whether he supports or opposes Measure 105.

But he said that whether or not voters approve the measure, "it will not affect the way we do business at the Baker County Sheriff's Office."

Ash, who also oversees the Baker County Jail, said his policy, which he says is consistent with Oregon's current law, is to notify federal immigration officials if an inmate who is in jail on other charges is also suspected of being in the country illegally.

But Ash also wrote that such situations are "rare."

That's not necessarily the case, however, in some of Oregon's more populous counties.

We agree with Knute Buehler, the

Republican candidate for governor, who said he will vote for Measure 105 because he believes repealing the sanctuary law will eliminate confusion and potential discrepancies in how individual counties deal with illegal immigration issues.

Opponents of the measure contend its passage would encourage police to engage in the noxious tactic of racial profiling. But the 1987 "sanctuary" law is not the only bulwark against profiling. In 2015 Gov. Kate Brown signed a law — one we support — that creates a database of profiling complaints against police, and an independent task force to review those complaints.

The Bend Bulletin, on Gov. Brown needing to show more transparency, release records

For all the talk from Gov. Kate Brown of supporting government openness and transparency, she seems to hope to be addressed as Gov. Openness. Yet, there's another example of her failing to live up to her talk.

Brown is denying the public access to legislation state agencies plan for the 2019 session until after the November election is over. The records should be made public now.

State agencies send proposed legislation to the governor's office every year before the legislative session. The state has what are called legislative concept approval forms. The forms require agencies to identify a problem and explain how a change in the law would fix it. The governor's office reviews them and can turn them down.

Such forms were submitted in the past to change the age of compulsory education from age 7 to age 5. There was one to change health insurance for inmates. There was another to limit information to the public in some state databases.

That's important public business that the public has a right to know. And in the past,

they have been provided to members of the public.

This year, with Brown up for election, the policy for releasing such records has changed. There are new instructions sent to agencies about the forms: "Although it is expected that agencies will have discussed legislative concept ideas with stakeholders, agencies are directed to treat this document as confidential and privileged and, accordingly, not to share the text of this form outside of state government before legislation is drafted and finalized."

That will be after the election is over. Does that make any sense at all except to hide what the government is doing from the public?

The state is claiming that release of the records now violates attorney-client privilege. That decision was upheld by Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum. Is that so? State agencies are forming critical policies to change state law. In many cases, as the state admits, it has publicly discussed its legislative concepts. And now, when an agency proposes an idea to the governor, it suddenly becomes top secret?

Knowing what proposed legislation a governor rejects and what he or she allows to proceed tells Oregonians important information about the governor.

Gov. Openness should not be trying to delay disclosure. She should be expediting it. Release the records. Now.

Corvallis Gazette-Times, on life returning to forests after blazes

In a summer when Oregon residents already have learned many lessons about wildfire, the Columbia River Gorge has one more to offer:

Even after the most devastating fires, the land finds ways to recover.

Don't misunderstand: The area of the gorge that was ablaze a year ago in the Eagle Creek fire isn't the same as it was before a thoughtless teenager tossed a firecracker into tinder-dry brush. In some ways, the fire has permanently altered the landscape.

But, as The Oregonian reported, the 49,000

acres burned in the fire already are showing signs of rebirth. Ten years from now, much of the burned forest will seem familiar to the hikers who frequented the gorge before the blaze.

The fire raced through a region that is well-loved by Oregon residents, within easy reach of the state's most populated area. Smoke choked the metro area. Ash fell from the sky in Portland. The area's tourism-driven businesses took serious hits.

The fire threatened the historic lodge at Multnomah Falls, which was saved only through the heroic actions of firefighters. The fire did destroy four homes. Interstate 84 was shut down for 10 days. Even navigation on the Columbia River was stopped for two days. A year later, the fire still has yet to be declared extinguished — hot spots continue to pop up, most recently in May.

All in all, it served as an urgent lesson, up close and personal, about the sheer power of wildfire.

And it angered people who were forced to pay attention, possibly for the first time, about that power.

The lessons that will play out over the next decades along the gorge will require long-term attention, but they're just as important to absorb as we move toward a deeper understanding of wildfire.

By the time a decade passes — a long time for humans, but not even a blink of an eye on nature's timeline — it will be much harder, but not impossible, to pick out signs of the fire. After all, most of the acreage burned in the blaze experienced only low and moderate burns; only about 15 percent was severely burned. In that area, mostly in higher elevations, dead trees (foresters and firefighters call them snags) will remain standing, but even these will have a role to play in the forest's rejuvenation.

Sooner or later, a fire was going to erupt in this landscape. It would have been better, of course, if the fire had been prescribed by foresters and carried out under controlled circumstances. But the first lesson here is that fire had a role to play in our forests.

The second lesson is just as important, and maybe even more so: Even after the most devastating fires, forests bounce back. That lesson will be playing out for decades in the Columbia River Gorge, if only we choose to look.