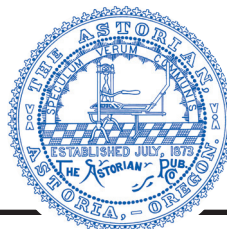


OPINION

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BEHIND THE NEWS

'I did my due diligence'

State Rep. Tiffany Mitchell is the target of a recall drive by #TimberUnity over her vote for cap and trade.

But House Bill 2020 — which would have squeezed industrial polluters and consumers to reduce fossil-fuel consumption and cut greenhouse gas emissions — wasn't a difficult choice for the Astoria Democrat. She campaigned last year on the need for action on climate change.



DERRICK DePLEDGE

Her hardest vote was in May for a new law that trims benefits to help contain the \$26 billion unfunded liability in the Public Employees Retirement System. Mitchell, who worked for the state Department of Human Services and was a member of the Service Employees International Union, was elected with union help.

"For those who are angered by my vote, I hope they know that I looked at this issue from every angle, thought about it, fought against it, and only arrived at the final outcome after significant deliberation and, from a human level, a lot of tears," she wrote in a vote explanation. "This was an incredibly complex issue, and I made the hardest decision of my life knowing that there would be a lot of implications and consequences for it."

Two unions that represent public workers have already struck back. The Oregon American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees will disqualify lawmakers who voted for pension reform from the endorsement process in next year's elections. The Oregon AFL-CIO will restrict contributions and support.

Mitchell will learn in December whether #TimberUnity gathers enough signatures to force a recall election. If not, she would still be up for reelection next year in House District 32.

In an interview, Mitchell talked about her pension vote, cap and trade, the recall and the lessons of her first session.

Q: The state House approved pension reform 31-29 in May only after two Democrats switched their votes. Many of your supporters in the labor movement saw your vote as a betrayal. How much pressure was there from House leadership?

A: I like to say that I do my research on big bills and complex topics. So in the terms of personal pressure, there really wasn't pressure.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

State Rep. Tiffany Mitchell described pension reform as her hardest vote.

There was obviously internal struggle because I had my values that I went in with, that I really wanted to represent, and found myself in a position of realizing that this issue was much larger than I thought it was before I had been elected. And having to wrestle with those values, essentially.

So, at the end of the day, I did the only thing that I could do, which was think about what was most important to me and that was protecting the pension and the people who I worked with. Because I was a state employee and an SEIU member, my own retirement is going to be through PERS.

As someone who believes that pensions are an incredibly important part of retirement security for people, I did what I had to be able to protect that pension long term for the employees that desperately deserve them.

Q: In hindsight, do you still feel it was the right choice?

A: If there were a better alternative, I would take the better alternative.

But we didn't have any better alternatives at the time, and I don't see the potential for better alternatives in the future.

Q: You campaigned on the need for Oregon to take steps to combat climate change. But do you think the House should have moved forward on House Bill 2020 — and place lawmakers like you at political risk — when Democrats weren't sure they had the votes in the Senate?

A: At the time that that bill moved forward,

they were pretty sure they had the votes in the Senate to get it to pass. So there was confidence on that end of it.

It only changed, really, after the House had made that vote.

And, again, as someone who prides themselves on trying to do an awful lot of research on those big topics before making those big decisions, I did my due diligence in trying to understand every single component of that particular issue, spent a lot of time listening to people.

There was incredibly strong support from the district for that bill, so I moved forward and voted confidently on something that I knew would actually be beneficial to Oregon and the Oregonians that live here in our communities that are already being impacted by climate change.

Q: What should happen now?

A: For me, it means continuing to listen to the constituency here in what they would like to see moving forward in a climate bill.

I don't think it's a matter of if, but when, another bill is going to be introduced. I've heard rumblings that that will be in the short session.

So all I can do is say climate change is an actual real threat to our communities. We should move forward in doing something to help mitigate and adapt to the changes that we will see here, because we are in a very, I think, precarious position where we are geographically to be really impacted by climate change.

Q: You were one of 36 House Demo-

crats to vote for HB 2020. Why do you think #TimberUnity has targeted you for recall?

A: I wish I could answer that question because I honestly don't know.

Again, as you pointed out, I was not the deciding vote on that particular bill ... There were a lot of people that voted for that bill because it was the right thing to do.

I can't control what other people do. All I can do is control what I do. And, as of right now, the way that I have chosen to deal with the situation and react to it is to still focus on what my responsibilities are as a state representative to the area, and to focus on my constituents and my work.

Q: This was your first legislative session in Salem. What did you learn that you didn't know when you got elected?

A: You always know that there's more nuance to an issue than probably you normally hear and see.

Typically, people only have exposure to issues at a very surface level, just based off of what they're able to read and digest. As a legislator, you really have to be willing to do that deep dive and to understand just how complex all of these issues are.

I think that was the biggest thing that I learned, is that topics are a lot more complex and more nuanced when you get to those state-level problems.

Q: #TimberUnity mailers urging your recall have started to arrive at people's homes. When you talk with voters individually, what do you most want them to know about you as a legislator?

A: The values that I presented to people about who I am are still true.

And that I am doing everything that I can to best represent the community in solving issues that people on their doorsteps told me they had concerns about. Things like wanting to make sure that their kids get a high-quality education, making sure that they can afford their health care.

Climate change is also one of those issues that people in their doors said that they were concerned about.

I feel like through a lot of the bills that we were able to pass this session ... I think we really delivered on those promises. And I am really proud of those accomplishments, and happy to defend myself whenever I'm up for election, because I think that we did a lot of really great things.

Derrick DePledge is the editor of The Astorian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reject recall

I believe we all should reject the attempt to recall Rep. Tiffany Mitchell.

Foremost, she is a hardworking Oregonian, doing yeoman duty to find a balance on complex problems such as climate change, school funding, health care, the state budget and the Public Employees Retirement System.

Go to her website and read the newsletters to see the depth of thought and consideration she gives to the positions she takes on these complicated and contentious issues.

She is doing her level best to find solutions and common ground among her many constituencies: industry, workers, management, unions, environmental advocates, ordinary citizens and so on. She is transparent in her work, accessible to her community, and has held numerous town halls.

Secondly, this is an abuse of the recall process. Recall should be reserved for officials who are derelict in their duty, who are guilty of either unethical, immoral, or illegal behavior, or are not fulfilling the basic duties of the job. Recall should not be used as a remedy for disagreement over policy; to do so assaults our democratic structure.

Rep. Mitchell is working daily to improve the lives of hardworking Oregonians by trying to provide affordable access to health care, protect the environment, fund education and provide affordable housing. And lastly, Mitchell is so selfless, she is currently in the process of donating a kidney, without even knowing the recipient.

This is not a person to remove from office. Quite the opposite. This is a person to sincerely thank for her devoted public service.

ERIC HALPERIN
Gearhart

Save Norriston Heights

The Oregon Department of Forestry has delayed for now a plan to clearcut a 77-acre forest next to Hug Point and Arcadia Beach State Recreation Site. Recently, citi-

zens filled the Clatsop County commissioners' chambers to discuss with ODF why the forest should be preserved.

ODF did not dispute a clearcut could jeopardize the quality and supply of drinking water. Just like clearcutting contributed to contamination of drinking water in Rockaway Beach. That is because clearcutting too close to drinking water sources often results in clearcut debris eroding into streams, contaminating drinking water and endangering wildlife.

ODF also did not dispute that tourism is important to our North Coast economy. People visit the North Coast for its beauty, recreation and wildlife. Yet this clearcut will be visible from these recreation areas and U.S. Highway 101, our scenic highway. A clearcut will contribute to the extinction of the marbled murrelet seabird and destroy wildlife habitat.

ODF pointed out local governments benefit financially from clearcuts. How does this benefit compare to the long-term costs of contaminated or inadequate drinking water, lost property values and lost tourism dollars?

One point was clear: ODF is funded from timber sales. ODF might not be as inclined to support clearcutting our forests, especially those near drinking water sources and recreation areas, if it was funded instead by the general treasury.

Urge ODF to preserve our Norriston Heights forest. Urge your legislators to overhaul forestry practices to protect drinking water and wildlife.

LAURA ALLEN
Seaside

Working hard

Every day I see my neighbors working hard to support their families and contribute to our community here in Cannon Beach.

I'm glad that we have state Rep. Tiffany Mitchell, who stands with working families. She voted for a law guaranteeing paid family medical leave for all Oregonians, and secured funding for health care for thousands



of our neighbors.

Between these, and passing an income tax credit that will benefit seniors and everyone here on the coast, I am sure she's the kind of leader we need.

MARY BETH COTTLE
Cannon Beach

her out of office at the next general election. That is the way an orderly democracy works.

MERIDEE FABER
Warrenton

Unity

I like the word "unity" in this #TimberUnity movement idea. Because unity is what we are going to need if we are to ever survive this climate crisis.

I am a 76-year-old still-working Oregonian. I have made my living as a logger, commercial fisherman, truck driver and in construction.

I am standing up for my grandchildren and their future world. A world I hope will be healthy, with clean air and clean water. I don't want anyone to lose their job, but we all need to change how we do our jobs if we are going to leave a livable world for our children and grandchildren.

We can all win if we begin to make our changes now. And if you think these first small steps are expensive, wait until you see what it will cost if we do nothing.

What will you tell your grandchildren when they ask: Why didn't you do something, if you knew what was happening? Let's stop calling names, dividing into for and against — let's work together in unity for healthy lives for our young ones.

TED MESSING
Astoria

Courage

I felt something akin to awe reading "Rep. Mitchell prepares to donate a kidney" (The Astorian, Sept. 17). What courage. It reminds me of her courage in voting for measures that some in this community oppose, such as the ironically named #TimberUnity group.

Rep. Mitchell endeavors to explain her votes, both in her monthly letters and in her town hall meetings. She is straight-forward, fact-driven and concerned for her hardworking constituents, voting for laws that help those communities, not harm them, laws that support the environment and schools, laws that prevent pharmaceutical companies from raising drug prices without notice and laws that provide for greater transparency in campaign finance.

Of course, #TimberUnity members have every right to their opinion. However, a recall effort should be focused on malfeasance in office, not simply a disagreement with a particular vote or votes. You don't like the way Rep. Mitchell has voted? Then vote