



Nicole Bales/The Astorian

Phil Mote, the director of the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute at Oregon State University, discusses climate change and its myths at the Columbia Forum on Tuesday night.

Forum: 'Rising seas and increasing storminess are already wreaking havoc'

Continued from Page A1

"Rising seas and increasing storminess are already wreaking havoc with many of the coastal areas," Mote said.

He shared an analysis of infrastructure at risk from 4 feet of sea level rise in counties along the coast.

Clatsop County was ranked the most affected county in all categories, including the number of people affected, number of homes, number of miles of roadway and number of sewage treatment plants.

"So, even 4 feet of sea level rise or high water event can really have impacts," Mote said.

Another myth he shared is the idea global warming is natural.

"There's a big difference between the human influence and the natural influences and together they can explain most of what we

saw in the 20th century record," Mote said.

However, he said science shows that human influence has been the dominant cause of global warming.

And scientists are not divided over that, he said.

"The closer you are to the evidence and to the work that all of the scientific community is doing, the clearer it is that humans are responsible," Mote said.

He also addressed the common misconception that there is time to prevent irreversible damage from climate change.

"At whatever point we stabilize CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere, in other words at whatever point we're done emitting CO2, that's roughly where the temperature will stop," Mote said. "There's nothing particularly magical about 2 degrees Celsius."

He said there's more impact with

each degree, but there is no tipping point. He said carbon dioxide emissions just need to be reduced as quickly as possible.

"There's a huge gap from where we're headed absent of policy and where we think we want to go in order to stabilize global climate. And this is one of the most out-front states in the union, California and a couple of others being ahead of us," Mote said.

He said stabilizing carbon dioxide emissions will be a major challenge.

"My view as a scientist is I want to see emissions reduced because I understand the harm that will happen if we don't reduce emissions. And whatever policy gets us to reduce emissions is fine with me — if it's cap and trade, if it's carbon tax, if it's just executive branch regulation — at any means necessary," he said.

Cap and trade: 'I don't think they get it'

Continued from Page A1

him to vote for cap and trade.

"The reason has to do with the poisoning of the well by virtue of the unsuccessful attempt to pass it this previous session," Bentz said. "I think the focus should be on carbon policy that has nothing to do with pricing carbon, and everything to do with addressing CO2 reduction using tools already available, and we have a lot of them."

He pointed out federal tax credits already exist to address some carbon issues.

Democrats worry that Senate Republicans might not show up in February, denying Democrats a quorum and from accomplishing anything ahead of what is expected to be an important election for both parties next fall.

"The walkout was only used as a vote blocking device because of the incredibly egregious nature of these bills and concepts," Bentz said. "I don't think people understand how overreaching HB 2020 was. I don't think they get it."

He said that if Democrats refer a constitutional amendment to voters changing Oregon's quorum requirement, he won't stand in the way. The Oregon Senate requires two-thirds of senators be present to act. There has been talk of changing that to a majority, which would allow the Democratic-controlled Senate in the current lineup to proceed without Republicans.

Bentz expects a public backlash to such a change.

"That's exactly what people are supposed to do when they see the majority overreaching. They need to step up and say 'no,'" Bentz said. "Now if that tool is taken

away by the people of Oregon, or a majority of them, then so be it. But there are going to be other ways people will express their dissatisfaction with the majority."

Feverish pressure

Gov. Kate Brown told reporters last week that she expects Senate Republicans to show up in February the same as she expects that from Democrats.

"They made a decision to run for the Legislature, and I expect them to show up and do their jobs," Brown said.

Senate Minority Leader Herman Baertschiger, R-Grants Pass, said he believes the short session shouldn't be used for big policy programs like cap and trade, rather budgetary fixes and minor legislative tweaks. He also said it's too early to discuss whether Republicans would use the denial of quorum as a tactic in 2020.

For Dembrow, he's not confident that a cap-and-trade proposal in 2020 would withstand the feverish pressure Republicans will surely feel against the legislation from

their base in an election year.

Although he's excited to see others take up the work he and his colleagues are pushing to get done in February, he's doubtful whether it will help Democrats in their pursuit of climate action.

"In some ways (these measures) could lead to quicker, stronger action than legislative action," he said. "Will they help move Republicans to allowing a climate bill to be considered in February? I don't know."

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group, Pamplin Media Group and Salem Reporter.

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