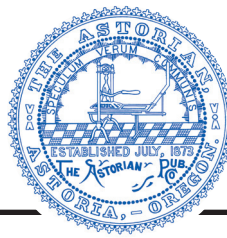


OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

A step forward on climate change

Oregon has the chance to make progress on reducing greenhouse gas emissions that influence climate change.

The new version of cap and trade in Salem is a step forward.

Senate Bill 1530 would put Oregon on a path to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 45% below 1990 levels by 2035 and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. The bill would set a cap on emissions that would decline over time. Industrial polluters would have to acquire allowances or offsets for emissions, and could buy and sell those allowances, providing a market-based incentive to convert to cleaner energy.

In a significant improvement over House Bill 2020, which failed in the Senate last year, the bill recognizes the state's regional economic differences.

Carbon pricing for fuel would start in the Portland metro area in 2022 and expand to Bend, Klamath Falls and counties west of the Cascades — including Clatsop County — in 2025. Other counties could opt in and it would take 20 counties before the regulation takes effect statewide, a buffer for rural areas against rapidly rising fuel costs.

The Legislature took a similar geographic approach to setting the minimum wage.

We opposed HB 2020 last year, primarily because we feared higher



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

King tides can offer a preview of what rising sea levels might look like on the North Coast.

fuel costs would have had a disproportionate impact on rural communities. The new version is more sensible.

Our other significant worry remains the potential impact on the Georgia-Pacific Wauna Mill, which employs more than 700 people in Clatsop County. Legislators have shown an interest in listening to industry — and have already made several exceptions — and we are hopeful the hearings this month will lead to amendments that make the bill more palatable.

We are disappointed by the politics surrounding this important issue.

Walkouts by Senate Republi-

cans, and Gov. Kate Brown's threat to force regulation through executive order, are counterproductive.

#TimberUnity, which grew out of protests by loggers and truckers, can provide a genuine voice for rural people who often feel left out in Salem. But the grassroots movement is in danger of being co-opted by political opportunists.

Apocalyptic language — on either side of the debate — makes it difficult to reach consensus on the public policy changes necessary to address climate change.

In an ambitious feat for a small newspaper, The Astorian published a series of articles on climate change in 2006 that warned

of the potential impact of sea level rise on people living on the North Coast. The newspaper, along with our sister publications in EO Media Group, is updating that series this year to see how the data has evolved.

We accept the scientific consensus that climate change is occurring and the primary driver is greenhouse gas emissions from human activity.

Legislators laid the groundwork for cap and trade through HB 2020 and spent the past several months working on revisions after hearing criticism. This is the kind of complex public policy that should be crafted by a deliberative body like the Legislature, rather than through executive order by the governor, or through the ballot box by voters.

We no longer agree that Oregon should wait for the federal government — or other countries — to find a national or global solution to climate change. As California and a coalition of states in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic have shown, states can be incubators for cap and trade and other innovative ideas, like capping emissions from power plants and transportation, to encourage cleaner energy.

Critics who object to some of the specifics of the bill should take the opportunity to suggest alternatives to the Legislature. The time for obstruction is over.

GUEST COLUMN

Cap and trade is not extreme

Perhaps you still doubt whether climate change is really occurring. Or, perhaps you accept it is occurring, but think it is part of a "natural cycle" and not due to human activity. Or, you think scientists are divided on this issue.

If this describes your thinking, I respectfully ask that you read "Consensus on consensus: a synthesis of consensus estimates on human-caused global warming." It was published in 2016 in the journal *IOPscience*, from the Institute of Physics.

When you read this study, it is very difficult to conclude anything other than climate change is occurring, that it is human caused, and that there is overwhelming scientific agreement on both points.

It is important for all of us to understand this. If there is doubt about the existence of climate change, or controversy over whether there is scientific agreement, it will reduce support for mitigation policies. Opponents to these policies are ever-ready to sow doubt about climate change, to slow or defeat implementation of strategies to solve the crisis. It is critical that we all seek credible information.

Maybe you accept climate change is occurring and even human caused, but don't think the effects will be felt locally, here in Clatsop County, at least not in your lifetime, or that of your children. And that climate change won't impact fisheries, forestry, agriculture, coastal infrastructure or the availability and cost of food.

If this describes your thinking, I urge you to look up news stories of the 2018 U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. Or read the report itself. Or search NASA and "the effects of climate change." The U.S. Department of Defense also released a report in 2019 on the impact of climate change on the military and our national security.

Even though the current administration seems to be moving full bore in the opposite direction of addressing climate change, including denying it, at least one branch of government is paying close attention. The Pentagon thinks it is all too real, and the impacts are of significant and dangerous consequence.

So how are we to address all of this? As a society, how do we move forward to try to solve this crisis? Here in Oregon we



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

High school students and other locals demanded more action to avert climate change at a demonstration in Astoria last year.

have attempted to pass cap and trade (and invest) legislation, to put a cap on the emission of greenhouse gases, and sell permits to those industries that emit them. The proceeds would be used to invest in jobs and technologies to further reduce emissions. The effort to pass this legislation is ongoing.

This has been controversial, to say the least. At its breaking point in the 2019 legislative session, Republican senators left not only their jobs, but the state, in their refusal to address the problem. Cap and trade has been labeled as extreme, and too costly to individuals and to the economy.

I would argue that cap and trade is hardly extreme. It was first put to use in the United States in 1990 during the Bush administration. Cap and trade was instituted as a free-market solution to the problem of acid rain in the Northeastern states. Acid rain was the result primarily of sulphur and nitrogen pollution from coal-fired power plants.

At that time, environmental groups pushed for federal legislation to make power plants remove sulphur dioxide from their emissions. Those proposals were

defeated. Instead, Republicans advocated for a free-market economic solution. This was instituted by amending the Clean Air Act to put a cap on the amount of pollution allowed, and made emitters pay a fee to buy permits to pollute; industry then had incentive to pollute less. And if they had permits left over, they could make money by selling them to other industries that were emitting over their allowance.

Critics say this just allows pollution to continue, that industry can just pay to pollute, and then pass the cost on to customers. But, in fact, it solved the acid rain problem. Industry found it was cheaper to reduce pollution and spend less to buy the permits. This same logic can be applied to greenhouse gas pollution. With economic incentive for industry to stop polluting, they will.

Besides, it should not be free for industry to pollute, when the cost of the pollution is borne by the rest of us in the form of reduced air quality and global warming.

A different strategy is to put a tax on greenhouse gas emissions, the so-called carbon tax. This is an idea being discussed in other states, as well as at the federal level by the Climate Solutions Caucus in

Congress. Economists debate the relative merits of cap and trade versus a carbon tax, but they all agree that either strategy will reduce greenhouse gas emission. The bottom line is both strategies correct a market failure in which polluters are not having to pay for the damages they impose on society as a whole.

Concern for the cost of these policies is understandable and appropriate. But we also must consider the cost of inaction. There is a long list of undesirable impacts of climate change that will befall our economy, our food supply, our natural resources, our infrastructure and our health and well-being. If we are so shortsighted as to think we cannot afford the short-term costs of mitigation, we will do ourselves grave harm. The long term consequences of inaction are certain to be devastating.

The climate crisis needs immediate attention, and it takes serious work by informed people. Every state in this nation, and every nation on this planet, must enact policy to stop the emission of greenhouse gases.

Eric Halperin is a retired optometric physician who lives in Gearhart.