

Minimum wage tax credit proposal on hold

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A legislative proposal to offset the cost of minimum wage increases to small businesses, farmers and other natural resources employers appears to be on hold until at least 2017.

Reps. Brian Clem, D-Salem, and John Davis, R-Wilsonville, had proposed giving tax credits to certain employers who are most likely to struggle financially to meet the requirements of a new three-tier minimum wage plan. The plan was laid out in Senate Bill 1532, which passed both legislative chambers earlier this month.

During negotiations with legislative leadership, the plan was whittled down to tax credits of no more than \$15 million a year only for employers involved in animal production, aquaculture, crop production, fishing, hunting, trapping and food manufacturing.

That amount was insufficient to cover the additional costs of all of those employers, so lawmakers would have had

to find a way to prioritize how to divvy out the tax credits, Clem said.

A group of associations representing agriculture has indicated it wants lawmakers to take more time to figure out those details, rather than push through legislation this session, which is scheduled to end by Sunday.

“The reality is that more time is needed to fully run cost and benefit scenarios to ensure any wage relief actually benefits the agriculture industry as a whole,” representatives from the agriculture industry wrote in a letter to Clem. “We believe there may only be one shot at alleviating the burden S.B. 1532 imposes on agriculture. The solution must meet the needs of our member families without picking winners and losers among the industry.”

The letter was signed by the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Dairy Farmers Association, Oregon Association of Nurseries, Northwest Food Processors Association, Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, Oregon Blueberry Commis-

sion, Oregon Seed Council, Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers Association, Far West Agribusiness Association and Oregon Wheat Growers League.

“I’m extremely disappointed that our bipartisan effort to try relieve some of the sign burden imposed by the minimum wage bill has been reduced so far,” Davis said. “Part of why there is so little interest in the current proposal is it’s just so small. If we were going to try to cover part or all of increase each year to all businesses, it is hundreds of millions and possibly billions of dollars. This is really a defacto tax we were trying to impose.”

Clem, who voted for the minimum wage bill, said he was concerned that small employers would have to lay off workers due to the cost of the increased minimum wage while larger employers would easily be able to absorb the cost.

The tax credit would have reduced the effective wage rate for those employers. The amount would gradually climb in tandem with the minimum wage, reaching up to \$2 per

hour per employee in July 2022.

Clem and Davis said their original concept also would have set smaller increases in minimum wage and lifted a ban against setting higher wages in Portland. It became clear early on in negotiations that both of those proposals were too complex to push through the waning days of the Legislature’s 35-day session, Clem said.

The minimum wage plan hikes minimum wages over a period of six years. The amount differs in each of three regions and is set according to a county’s median income and cost of living. In Portland, minimum wage will reach \$14.75 in the Portland area, \$12.50 in rural and coastal counties with struggling economies and \$13.50 in the rest of the state by 2022.

Clem said he plans to pursue the wage support proposal in 2017.

“I think it’s fair to say the independent-minded Democrats are satisfied that if Ag thinks we can wait then we can wait to get it right,” Clem said.

One ballot proposal dropped

SALEM (AP) — Oregon lawmakers have avoided at least one ballot fight with this month’s passage of an alternative measure to raise the state’s minimum wage through a unique tiered system based on geography, although a second, more aggressive ballot proposal still looms.

A coalition of labor and community groups, called the Raise the Wage coalition, said Monday that members have stopped gathering signatures for their November ballot proposals that would have raised the minimum wage to \$13.50 an hour statewide over two or three years and allowed cities and local governments to set their rates above that threshold.

Instead, Senate Bill 1532, which Gov. Kate Brown has until Thursday to sign into law, will impose smaller hikes — except in metro Portland — in double the time period. The increases will differ based on three geographic regions, rather than a statewide hike, and keeps pre-emption in place that bans local governments from setting their own rates.

“While this proposal (SB 1532) diverges from our initial plan for raising the wage, it is overwhelmingly a win for Oregon workers — in large part because it gives a raise to over 100,000 minimum-wage workers this July,” Andrea Miller, executive director of Causa Oregon, one of the coalition members, said in a statement. “Most notably, this bill contains no carve-outs or exceptions for different classes of workers, like farmworkers or restaurant workers, or for people just starting out in their career.”

Two competing energy bills up for Senate vote

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Lawmakers in the Oregon Senate could on Wednesday vote on two competing bills to double the state’s renewable energy mandate, thanks to maneuvers by Democrats and Republicans to either fast track or delay the legislation.

The controversial legislation, which is a top priority for utilities, environmental groups and Democrats in both chambers, could be among the last major policy proposals lawmakers vote on before the end of the short legislative session.

Both bills would require PacifiCorp and Portland General Electric to use sources such as solar and wind to serve 50 percent of their customers’ energy demand by 2040. The bills would also require the two investor-owned utilities to stop using coal power to serve their Oregon customers.

However, there are also significant differences between

the bills including caps on how much the utilities can raise rates each year to cover their costs, including a profit on new renewable energy facilities. The first bill, House Bill 4036, calls for the Oregon Public Utility Commission to adopt regulations that encourage competitive bidding and diverse ownership of renewable energy facilities, something not required under the second bill, Senate Bill 1547. That second bill also includes incentives to boost wood-burning power plants.

Senate Bill 1547 has more momentum, thanks to support from environmental groups and the two investor-owned utilities. Brad Reed, a spokesman for the politically active nonprofit Renew Oregon which represents environmental and renewable energy groups, said Senate Bill 1547 appears to have the clearest path forward. “And this bill enjoys support from clear majorities in both the House and Senate,” Reed wrote in an email Monday afternoon.

Utility representatives have also said they dislike the 3 percent annual cap on renewable energy rate increases in the first bill, and they would prefer the 4 percent cap on renewable rate increases in the second bill. The utilities can request the renewable energy rate increases on top of broader periodic rate increases.

House lawmakers already voted 39-20 to pass House Bill 4036, in mid-February. After news reports that Gov. Kate Brown’s administration had told public utility commissioners not to go public with their concerns about the bill, a Senate committee added language to the bill to protect consumers and ensure utilities use competitive bidding to acquire cost-efficient new sources of renewable energy.

Next, Republicans in the Senate, who oppose the bill, brought it to a standstill by requesting that lawyers draft a minority report. There is no deadline to produce the report, so the move threatened to prevent the measure from

coming to a vote before the end of the session.

Supporters of the bill, including Democrats in both chambers and Rep. Mark Johnson, R-Hood River, responded with a plan on Thursday to insert a new version of the renewable energy mandate legislation into a different bill, Senate Bill 1547, that had already passed in the Senate. Lawmakers negotiated that legislation in closed-door meetings with representatives of the utilities, environmental and renewable energy groups.

Although two representatives of the Public Utility Commission attended the negotiations, none of the public utility commissioners were involved nor did they testify last week when a House committee voted to insert the negotiated language into Senate Bill 1547. Members of the Public Utility Commission have said an earlier version of the legislation would be costly for consumers but do little to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from coal plants.

Inmates accuse prison officials of misplacing breast milk

PORTLAND (AP) — Inmates at Oregon’s only prison for women are accusing staff of mixing up breast milk they pumped for their infants on the outside, potentially exposing their children to risks.

Four inmates at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville say prison staff mixed up their bags of milk last fall, *The Oregonian* reported.

One of the nursing mothers was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, causing the mothers to worry about their children’s health.

“I wanted to feed my baby healthy natural milk for at least a year,” said Marcie Harris, 35, who gave birth to a girl in August. “...They disregarded my baby’s health and well-being.”

Coffee Creek offers a number of parenting programs for incarcerated mothers, including the milk program for women who give birth while in prison. Milk is stored in bags, sometimes marked with an inmates’ name and sometimes not, and delivered to families, foster parents or case workers.

Oregon Department of Corrections spokeswoman Betty Bernt said milk program supervisors have addressed the problem and now require inmates to check bags before they are sent to caregivers.

Corrections

The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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AccuWeather.com Forecast

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
64° 39°	58° 41°	57° 39°	60° 43°	60° 44°

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST

64°	39°	58°	41°	57°	39°	60°	43°	60°	44°
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HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST

64°	40°	62°	39°	61°	34°	61°	42°	61°	45°
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ALMANAC

PENDLETON
through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	55°	33°
Normals	51°	32°
Records	66° (1968)	13° (1960)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.86"
Normal month to date 1.17"
Year to date 2.37"
Last year to date 1.55"
Normal year to date 2.55"

HERMISTON
through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	57°	38°
Normals	53°	31°
Records	72° (1972)	7° (1960)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.39"
Normal month to date 0.99"
Year to date 1.49"
Last year to date 1.06"
Normal year to date 2.27"

SUN AND MOON

	Last	New	First	Full
	Mar 1	Mar 8	Mar 15	Mar 23

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

REGIONAL FORECAST

Coastal Oregon: Breezy today with periods of rain. Mostly cloudy tonight with a shower in places.

Eastern and Central Oregon: Variable clouds today with a passing shower, except dry in the south.

Western Washington: Periods of rain today; a morning shower in spots, then periods of rain across the south.

Eastern Washington: A little rain today; rain, mixed in the north with snow early. A bit of morning snow, then a little wintry mix in the mountains.

Cascades: Periods of rain today. Turning colder in central parts; mild in the south.

Northern California: Cloudy today; afternoon rain; however, dry in the interior mountains.

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Wed.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	56	44	r	55	47	r
Baker City	53	31	c	52	32	pc
Bend	58	32	r	58	39	pc
Brookings	56	45	r	59	49	r
Burns	53	27	c	51	31	s
Enterprise	52	30	sh	49	32	pc
Eugene	55	40	r	59	47	pc
Heppner	62	35	sh	58	41	pc
Hermiston	64	32	c	62	45	pc
John Day	56	31	sh	59	35	pc
Klamath Falls	56	31	sh	52	39	pc
La Grande	56	35	sh	54	41	pc
Meacham	54	31	sh	52	39	pc
Medford	58	38	r	66	44	pc
Newport	56	45	r	58	48	r
North Bend	58	44	r	63	50	r
Ontario	64	36	c	60	37	s
Pasco	60	42	r	61	40	pc
Pendleton	64	39	sh	58	41	pc
Portland	56	43	r	58	46	c
Redmond	61	27	r	62	36	pc
Salem	57	42	r	57	46	c
Spokane	49	36	r	48	36	pc
Ukiah	58	30	sh	54	37	pc
Vancouver	55	45	r	57	46	c
Walla Walla	63	42	sh	59	42	pc
Yakima	55	36	r	59	35	pc

WORLD CITIES

	Today			Wed.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	54	27	s	66	31	s
Hong Kong	66	58	s	67	60	s
Jerusalem	75	59	s	77	56	pc
London	54	39	r	47	39	sh
Mexico City	69	51	pc	64	47	pc
Moscow	29	25	c	39	32	i
Paris	47	41	r	49	38	sh
Rome	63	42	s	60	49	pc
Seoul	38	28	s	49	33	s
Sydney	81	70	s	84	71	pc
Tokyo	47	37	pc	50	41	s

WINDS

(in mph)	Today	Wednesday
Boardman	N 6-12	WSW 4-8
Pendleton	S 8-16	SSW 4-8

UV INDEX TODAY

0 2 3 2 0 0

8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.

0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme

The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

National Summary: A storm will spread snow across the Great Lakes with rain near the Ohio River and severe storms farther south to the Gulf Coast today. Another storm will bring rain and mountain snow to the Northwest.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 91° in Imperial, Calif. Low -11° in Flag Island, Minn.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Wed.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	70	40	s	73	41	s
Atlanta	71	39	pc	55	36	pc
Atlanta City	52	44	pc	47	28	sh
Baltimore	59	46	pc	50	26	pc
Billings	55	38	pc	54	31	pc
Birmingham	71	40	c	57	39	pc
Boise	64	40	c	59	40	s
Boston	43	34	pc	50	19	r
Charleston, SC	76	57	pc	69	41	pc
Chicago, IL	67	34	pc	38	26	sf
Chicago	30	16	sn	30	23	pc
Cleveland	45	24	sn	28	21	sf
Dallas	69	41	s	71	57	s
Denver	58	37	pc	63	32	pc
Detroit	34	19	sn	31	19	c
El Paso	79	47	s	83	49	s
Fairbanks	27	1	s	25	1	s
Fargo	26	18	s	35	22	pc
Honolulu	81	64	pc	79	64	s
Houston	80	53	r	72	55	s
Indianapolis	52	20	r	39	28	pc
Jacksonville	80	57	s	75	42	pc
Kansas City	45	26	c	63	41	s
Las Vegas	81	55	s	82	55	pc
Little Rock	66	37	c	62	49	s
Los Angeles	81	56	pc	77	55	pc
Louisville	59	30	t	43	32	pc
Memphis	64	36	r	57	46	pc
Miami	79	66	pc	83	66	pc
Millwaukee	29	12	sn	29	17	pc
Minneapolis	27	17	pc	34	24	pc
Nashville	66	34	t	48	36	pc
New Orleans	79	53	t	68	50	s
New York City	47	41	pc	51	24	r
Oklahoma City	63	36	s	70	44	s
Omaha	38	25	c	54	34	pc
Philadelphia	57	46	pc	51	26	r
Phoenix	89	59	s	90	60	s
Portland, ME	36	26	pc	49	12	r
Providence	46	35	pc	53	20	r
Raleigh	71	51	pc	54	29	pc
Rapid City	49	24	c	53	29	pc
Reno	69	36	pc	69	40	sh
Sacramento	74	45	pc	74	50	pc
St. Louis	53	27	r	50	41	pc
Salt Lake City	63	42	pc	60	38	s
San Diego	74					