

GOP says cap and trade is being kept in dark

Sen. Bentz says bill is being rushed for no reason

By AUBREY WIEBER
Oregon Capital Bureau



Bentz

course of the year I would be left out," Bentz said. "What's much more concerning is that this is a complicated piece

of work, and there's zero reason to rush on this bill."

On Monday, House Republicans accused Democrats of hiding the bill, expected to become public Thursday.

"From what I have heard from many people is that bipartisan ideas are the best," Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, R-Albany, said in the Republican statement. "This should be a bill that is bipartisan for all Oregonians. Yet, the fact is, the bill has only been seen and written by one party. I think that one might need to simply say we don't want your help in this bill."

Dembrow said no one is being shut out. He said a legislative attorney assigned to the legislation took a week off during the holidays and the process is taking longer than expected.

Rep. Karin Power, D-Milwaukie, also a co-chair, opened Monday's committee meeting by addressing the elephant in the room.

"We all would love to see this bill," she said. "We're a little behind in Legislative Counsel and in publications and its causing frustration, but that is not because we are sitting in a closed room somewhere drafting it."

On Tuesday, Power said she has since met with Republicans in the committee but declined to elaborate on the conversations. Power said she and Dembrow intend to hear from Republicans and others impacted by climate change or facing new financial burdens from new regulations.

Anna Braun, Courtney's legislative director, said committee leaders from both parties have met regularly to discuss the legislation since the summer. The only change was when the concepts were sent to staff attorneys to turn into draft legislation in late December.

Dembrow said he doesn't

have the draft.

The partisan divide comes just months after an election cycle that gave Democrats a three-fifths majority in the House and Senate as well as the re-election of Democratic Gov. Kate Brown. Republicans had warned that Democrats would act alone to push through major legislation. Democrats have promised to continue working with their Republican colleagues.

In an interview Tuesday, Dembrow said the Republican complaints are a tactic to undermine the legislation, which Bentz has long opposed.

"To prepare for what's going to be a controversial debate over this subject, I think that they are trying to poison the well," Dembrow said.

Dembrow said the legislation is similar to what was introduced in 2018, and that he has shared with Bentz the final directives given to legislative lawyers.

Bentz confirmed that, but said he found the concept problematic. He said polling shows Oregonians clearly want to regulate carbon. But Bentz wants to make sure the state doesn't hurt individuals and the business community. He wants to call out the dangers of the bill, which he says could put a "straightjacket" on Oregon's economy.

"It's deeply concerning because we don't have all the time in the world," Bentz said. "This sends a signal that there is a rush to get this thing passed way sooner than when it probably should be passed. It's a really complex piece of work."

The legislation, a cap on carbon emissions for some sectors, has been hotly debated in the Legislature for a few years. It was abandoned in 2018 as time ran out during a short session of the Legislature.

But even after all the study and testimony, some members of the committee are worlds apart. On Tuesday, Sen. Alan Olsen, R-Canby, took to the Senate floor to denounce the cap-and-trade effort, saying the worst polluters reside

in other countries and Oregonians shouldn't take on the burden of limiting emissions.

Dembrow, standing toward the back of the Senate floor, flashed a wry smile. After, he said Olsen is holding a "marginal position." Olsen has often been critical of the widely viewed scientific outlook that climate change is human-caused.

Dembrow said the Legislature created the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute in 2007, which is stocked with researchers from public colleges around the state. It works to vet the research coming out of the scientific community to inform legislators.

"I'm inclined to listen to them," Dembrow said of the scientific community.

Dembrow hopes to get bipartisan support, but he doesn't know if that will happen.

"This is a subject fraught with political controversy," he said. "Our goal is to put forth the best program, the best piece of legislation that we can, that can be a model for other states to follow."

Courtney said he prefers bipartisan legislation, but won't apologize for acting otherwise to pass good policy.

"There comes a time when if you can't do it, then you gotta do it alone with just your own family," Courtney said. "I don't like that, but I'm not going to deny that."

Courtney said he became aware on Friday that conversations about the carbon bill between parties had broken down, though he didn't think it was intentional. He came in during the weekend to talk with a Republican senator about it.

Courtney said he doesn't know if the rift between parties will last.

He said the most significant legislative input isn't in drafting a proposal but in debating and amending it.

"I'm a bill guy," Courtney said. "I'm not a 'let's have a conversation.' Everybody's walking around here wanting to have a conversation. What is that? I want a bill. Get me a bill, and then we'll start to go."



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The Centers for Disease Control has reported that the number of children not receiving vaccinations has quadrupled since 2001.

Measles: Virus spreads easily

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edge. Places where people might have been exposed include various stores, the Portland International Airport, Oregon Museum of Science and Industry and the Moda Center.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said measles linger in the air and on surfaces.

"Measles is about as contagious as it gets," Fiumara said. "It's spread via droplet transmission and it's one of the few that can survive in one area for a couple of hours. It hangs around a lot longer than others do."

According to research, communities can protect themselves with herd immunity. If most of us get vaccinated, the rest — such as babies too young to be vaccinated, people undergoing cancer therapy or those with immune system deficiencies — will be protected.

Fiumara said at least 90 to 95 percent of children should receive the two doses of the mumps, measles and rubella (MMR) vaccine to provide a proper level of immunity.

Fiumara said herd immunity is holding strong in Umatilla County.

"In Umatilla County, we're not overly worried about the outbreak going on right now," he said.

He made a few clicks with his mouse and pulled up an interactive map created by the Oregon Health Authority. For each Oregon county (and school within each county), it showed vaccination rates for students K-12 during the 2017-18 school year. Rates varied, depending on the school. The Blue Mountain Mennonite School, in Milton-Freewater, had the lowest MMR vaccination rate of 76 percent. Umatilla County as a whole, however, had a rate of 98 percent. Morrow County's rate was 99 percent.

"For us, we just need to be aware and make sure we're up on our vaccinations, especially if traveling," he said. "If you're going through an airport, you don't know who was there before you. They

don't have to be in front of you to share."

In Washington, Gov. Jay Inslee declared a state of emergency last Friday. Two confirmed cases of measles connected to the Washington outbreak ended up in Hawaii. The family remained quarantined for their entire stay on the Big Island.

For Oregon parents whose children are unvaccinated, exclusion day is coming. On Feb. 20, students whose shot records are not up to date won't be allowed to attend school. Last year in Umatilla County, about 500 warning letters went out and 100 students were turned away on Exclusion Day. This year's letters will go out next week.

Parents may choose to apply for non-medical exemptions if they wish. Those parents, Fiumara said, will be required to receive education about each vaccination from which they want their child to be exempted. Many are doing just this. The CDC reported that the number of children not receiving vaccines has quadrupled since 2001.

Anti-vaxxers have focused on a 1998 study linking the MMR vaccine and autism. The study was later retracted but its influence remains. Fiumara encouraged parents to choose vaccination.

"Studies have shown time and time again that vaccinations have saved countless lives," he said.

The Umatilla County Health Department will offer several immunization clinics for children needing vaccinations. On Feb. 14 and 15, a walk-in clinic is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Hermiston, 435 E. Newport St. On Feb. 19, the Pendleton clinic, 200 S.E. Third St., will give shots from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

On Exclusion Day, Feb. 20, both clinics will offer vaccinations during normal hours. Bring insurance information and immunization cards, if available.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0810.

Graduates: Districts take varied approaches

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nearly 5.5 points below the white graduation rate.

A recent audit from the Oregon Secretary of State's Office found the achievement gap for Latinos and other students of color "troubling."

In comparison, the Milton-Freewater Unified School District has near parity between white and Hispanic student graduation rates.

Milton-Freewater Superintendent Rob Clark said the work from staff and changes in the community assisted in graduation growth.

"The assimilation of Latinos is evolving," Clark said, meaning parents are

more likely to be involved in school functions.

In some districts, like Stanfield and Morrow County, Latino students flipped the script, outpacing their white peers' graduation rate.

Morrow County Superintendent Dirk Dirksen said his district's mantra is to "meet students where they're at."

While that comes in a variety of forms, for immigrant high school students, it means sending them to a "welcome center" at Riverside High School in Boardman.

Dirksen said these students are given a lighter class schedule and less teachers as they're accultur-

ated into Morrow County schools.

Once they finish a year at the center, they're moved on to a regular high school schedule.

Stanfield Superintendent Beth Burton said her district didn't do anything specific for Latino students, adding that Stanfield Secondary School's college readiness initiatives could have an effect.

Burton said counselor Kirsten Wright and the Generation College club she runs take students on trips to colleges and provide a strong motivator to graduate.

The Hermiston School District also saw some growth in Hispanic gradua-

tion, but a nearly 8 point gap exists between Latino and white students' rates.

Regardless of race, Hermiston Superintendent Tricia Mooney said the district hopes its approach to literacy will pay dividends for graduation rates in the future.

Mooney said by expanding the district's literacy focus to include reading, writing, speaking and listening, it should help in all facets of educational performance.

Like Sipe and Clark, Mooney highlighted the district's higher completer rate — a statistic that includes students who completed a diploma or GED after the target graduation date.

Spending: Water, sewer, street improvements set

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to do an overlay on Hermiston Avenue from Northwest 11th Street to First Street.

Year two will bring paving on East Theater Lane, year three will be a hiatus to build up cash and year four will be a \$1.5 million realignment of the intersection of Geer Road, Harper Road, River Road and the railroad crossing located west of Home Depot. Year five will be the North First Place project and resurfacing West Theater Lane.

Water

To pay for water and sewer projects, the city recently restructured and increased its water and sewer rates. The new rates go into effect March 1.

Projects on the list for

water include an upgrade to Well #6, which serves "critical customers" such as the Wal-Mart Distribution Center and Pioneer Seed, Morgan said.

The city also plans to replace the "system-wide brain" that has run the city's water system since 1999.

"I don't know how many of you have a 20-year-old computer, but that's basically what we have running our system," Morgan said.

The city also wants to add a new coat of paint and cathodic protection to the city water tank behind Sunset Park to extend its life, replace a chlorination structure and expand a water line down Geer Road. There are also plans to replace several steel water mains throughout town that were built in the 1920s.

Sewer

On Monday, the city approved a bid from Sineco Construction of Hermiston for its first sewer project on the capital improvement plan, which will replace a narrow sewer line along Southeast Seventh Street that has been creating a "bottleneck" and causing concerns about possible overflow in the event of an equipment failure.

"We've been holding our breath and crossing our fingers every time we have the fair up at EOTEC," Morgan said.

Other projects in the \$6.5 million in recycled water spending for the next five years include two lift station reconstructions.

Most of the rest of the money will be put in reserve for 2024. The city's

recycled water treatment plant was built in 2014, and Morgan said several expensive components have an expected shelf life of about 10 years.

City staff are good at extending the life of capital assets, he said, but the city needs to be prepared in case things start breaking in 2024.

City councilors praised staff and the public infrastructure committee for their work on the capital improvement plan.

Drotzmann said the League of Oregon Cities estimates cities around the state have a combined \$7 billion in needed water and sewer infrastructure projects.

"I think this is huge, and I'm excited and proud of the city for doing it," he said.

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