EAST OREGONIAN
OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Plan provides plenty for cronies, nothing for climate

Democrats north of us who run the Washington Legislature are considering bills to tax carbon, cap greenhouse gases, make all electricity renewable, mandate more biofuels in gasoline and diesel, and govern by "environmental justice."

Washington's agenda has the twin goals of banishing fossil fuels and funding a bigger government to provide "equitable distribution of benefits" to as-yet undefined "highly impacted communities."

Supporters say action is overdue on both fronts because global temperatures and sea levels are rising and the poor are least able to adapt. And who can argue with any of that?

This "Evergreen New Deal" will increase the cost of producing, processing and transporting farm and manufactured goods. It will increase the cost of motor fuels and electricity.

But even if fully implemented it will have no impact on the climate. None.

Washington state climatologist Nick Bond admits the state's effect on the climate is at most infinitesimal. That's probably generous. Based on state, national and international estimates, Washington contributes less than 0.25% of the world's greenhouse gases. That puts it behind Ethiopia, a country with an economy about a sixth the size of Washington's.

Capital Press/Don Jenkins, File

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee speaks to environmental activists Jan. 29 at a rally on the Capitol steps in Olympia. A presidential candidate, Inslee has made climate change his signature issue and supports several bills such as cap-and-trade.

But the impacts on Washingtonians will be huge, if not life-changing.

Democrats are pushing for Washington state to meet the Paris climate accord's goals. That would mean reducing the state's total greenhouse gas emissions — mainly carbon dioxide — by 81.5% by 2050.

If all the greenhouse gases emitted in Washington by cars, trucks, ships, boats, jetliners, cement plants, aluminum smelters, semiconductor manufacturers, coal- and natural gas-fired power plants and cows went away today, the state would still be emitting too much carbon to meet the Paris goal.

It's unclear, outside of respiration, what will be left to cut. It's also unclear how fields will be plowed, or how crops will be planted, harvested, processed and delivered.

If the point of this is to impact the climate — and we're pretty sure that it is not — its utter lack of impact should be enough to stop it dead in its tracks.

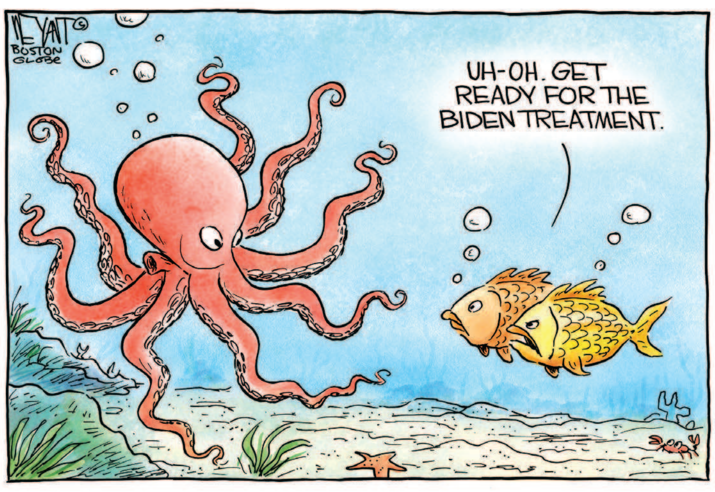
But the second objective of the bills under consideration, what we think is their primary objective, nearly ensures their passage.

Supporters propose a cap-and-trade model that would require manufacturers, electric utilities, natural gas companies and fuel distributors to ramp down greenhouse gases or bid for "allowances." The auctions would raise $1.23 billion in their first two years and $1.55 billion the following two years, the state estimates.

That's a lot of money, most of which would eventually be paid by consumers. After the state takes a healthy cut it will be redistributed on the recommendations of an Environmental and Economic Justice Panel in the form of grants for housing, health programs, rural internet and "improved community services."

When this fails to produce any climate impacts, we suspect additional measures and new revenue sources will be necessary.

More money for government, more money for cronies, zero impact on climate — two out of three ain't bad for plan supporters. Washingtonians footing the bill might see it differently.



YOUR VIEWS

Christian life is not just the avoidance of hell

A Christian life is to be a life like no other. Because of this we must understand the gospel truth requires telling the whole story. In doing this we are to stop thinking like immature children.

Paul's admonition to the Corinthians should be thought-provoking. He insisted we be as grown-ups when it comes to the teaching of Jesus Christ: mature, complete, in one's thoughts and actions.

This is not the case in a recent advertisement in the *East Oregonian* of March 28, 2019: "Should you be sent to Hell, how would you plead?" The term Hell/Gehenna/Hades/Sheol is a highly subjective abstract term.

Without a rigorous present-day theological study, the Apostle Paul said one mustmove from the milk to the meat; one is left vulnerable to distorted, lopsided, teaching as found in this advertisement. One should ask when faced with something of this nature, "What sort of concept is in this advertisement, and can it be justified?" The advertisement amounts to one of unthinking Christian fundamentalism.

For Paul, if we are to understand the beauty of the gospel, the cross and resurrection belong together (1 Cor. 15 14). Christ has united us with himself. The risen Christ is present with us by his Spirit, empowering and reshaping our lives as we allow. Jesus said, ""Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." This being a joint operation, a covenantal relationship.

The King and his kingdom are here, now! If our understanding of the good news is restricted solely to removing our sin, then we risk reducing Jesus to mere formula and a method for countering sin. It then follows, we are to believe once saved always saved.

The gospel is much more complex than this. The gospel possesses so much detail it challenges comprehension. The gospel, proclaimed in a Christ-centered Christianity, moves us from simply avoiding sin, and the Christian fundamentalist literal fear of hell, to actually loving God and our neighbor as Jesus loves our neighbor. Now there's a challenge!

A Christian life is to be a life like no other. We are to grow in wisdom as we weave together theological insight. In this one moves from the fear mongers' hell.

Ron Gavette
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

$2 billion schools investment requires pension reforms

The Oregonian/OregonLive

When it comes to advocating for their children's schools, Oregon families are a force of nature. They organize bake sales, car washes and auctions for a fundraising cycle that never ends. They give up national holidays to rally at the state Capitol for more education dollars. And from local school board meetings to legislative hearings, they testify about overcrowded classrooms, understaffed libraries and bottom-tier graduation rates that show just how poorly Oregon is serving its students.

Their effort and energy may finally pay off. Lawmakers and business interests are studying corporate tax proposals to raise as much as $2 billion more per budget cycle to buy Oregon students a longer school year, more mental health counselors, special education instructors and other investments. With tax-friendly Democratic supermajorities in the Legislature, education advocates are hopeful that such an infusion of cash could finally help Oregon's schools turn the corner on mediocrity.

But if they want such investments to stick, parents should consider focusing their advocacy work on the spending side of the equation — particularly, the need for reforms to the Public Employees Retirement System. With a $27 billion unfunded liability in the PERS fund, public employers face steep increases in how much they will have to contribute for the next several budget cycles.

And even $2 billion in new money on top of record revenue in Oregon's red-hot economy won't be enough to save school districts from the massive public pension debt crushing them and other public employers.

In fact, in the 2019-21 budget cycle, schools' required pension contributions will claim a quarter of the new revenue that the Legislature is looking to dedicate, *The Oregonian*/OregonLive's Mike Rogoway reported. By 2023, that goes up to 40 percent — and will continue to rise through the decade if the state fails to adopt significant steps to reform the system and curb employers' contributions. That doesn't even factor in the PERS costs for higher education institutions, state agencies or other public employers, which will be taking a heavy toll on those budgets as well.

And while Gov. Kate Brown is searching for a way to protect those new dollars from being sucked up by the pension debt, she's yet to unveil any viable plan that achieves that.

So much for the grand vision of what Oregon schools can be.

Broaching pension reform is no easy task when the most promising solutions require cutting future benefits for teachers and other public employees. And certainly, the governor and legislative leaders, who are expected to lead in crises of this magnitude, have shown little appetite to seek those changes from public employee unions, who rank among their largest and most loyal donors.

But that's why education advocates, PTAs and families whose primary concern is students — not donors — must take up the mantle, sort fact from fiction and push for change. They should resist the simplistic falsehood that being pro-PERS reform is the same as being anti-teacher. They should recognize that the promise of additional revenue means little when only pennies on the dollar will make it into the classroom. And they should recognize that the only way out of Oregon's pension mess is for everyone — businesses, taxpayers and public employees — to share in the pain so that students, low-income Oregonians and the state's most vulnerable can be protected as much as possible.

It's worth clarifying a few common misconceptions many have about PERS:

Fact: While Oregon must honor promises made to employees and retirees for work they've already completed, they can change benefit levels for work going forward, as both the Oregon Supreme Court and legislative lawyers have made clear. That leaves a lot of possibilities for legislators to make changes, including a slate of reforms offered by advocates.

Fact: While newer employees receive a more modest retirement package than earlier employees, they still receive a generous retirement package that includes both a guaranteed monthly pension as well as a 401(k) type plan. That's a combination that only 13% of employees in the private sector get, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Rather, private-sector workers typically get only a 401(k).

Fact: Oregon teachers and other public employees do not contribute their own money to the pension fund — unlike public employees in other states. While many employees pay 6% of their salary to their 401(k)-type account, that does not go to the pension fund. That's a key distinction. One proposal pushed by PERS reform advocates would redirect that 6% into the pension fund — easing the contribution that employers have to make and leaving more dollars for the services and programs that Oregonians and Oregon students deserve.

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