

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Legislature needs to go back to the drawing board on HB 2020

No matter what its supporters assert, Oregon House Bill 2020 isn't ready for primetime.

HB 2020 is the hopelessly complicated climate change legislation that has evolved into the key bill for Democrats in the 2019 session. The bill is grounded in good intentions. The global climate is changing, and humans are the cause. Just about everyone can agree we should — and must — do something to improve the environment and to battle climate change. How to do that, though, is where it gets complicated and HB 2020 is exhibit A in just how good intentions can quickly become convoluted and dense.

The legislation will create a mandatory, statewide greenhouse gas emission reduction plan. The emission reduction plan targets companies that discharge more than 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents each year. Carbon dioxide equivalents are a collection used to measure how much greenhouse gas is entering the atmosphere.

Supporters of the bill assert it will help the environment and curb cli-



Courtesy photo

House Bill 2020 is the expansive and complex legislation that would put Oregon at the forefront of U.S. efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change.

mate change. Opponents believe the plan will hike gas prices, hurt the economy and drive major firms away from the state. Who is correct is a matter of opinion and party affiliation.

While nearly byzantine in its form, HB 2020 is also not a piece of legisla-

tion that will get the necessary review and debate it needs. Democrats hold a super majority at the Legislature, which means they can pretty much push through whatever legislation they want unmolested.

Also troubling is the fact that Dem-

ocratic lawmakers have signaled time and again they are not going to listen to input from their Republican brethren on the bill. They are going to jam it through regardless.

Democracy works when there is debate, discussion and compromise. When one party takes power — whether it is Republican or Democrat — and operates more like a faction than a group of lawmakers determined to do the people's business, Democracy loses.

A few years ago, lawmakers joined together, created and passed a massive transportation bill. Legislators — on both sides of the aisle — spent more than a year traveling the state, holding public meetings to gather input on the legislation. Lawmakers used a methodical process to fine tune the transportation legislation.

Now, they should do the same with House Bill 2020. Shoving through the legislation may save the consciousness of would-be world savers but it won't help Democracy and it won't help the state.

HB 2020 isn't ready for primetime. Not yet.

OTHER VIEWS

When trolls and crybullies rule the earth

Over the past several years, teenage suicide rates have spiked horrifically. Depression rates are surging, and America's mental health overall is deteriorating. What's going on?

My answer starts with technology but is really about the sort of consciousness online life induces.

When communication styles change, so do people. In 1982, scholar Walter Ong described the way, centuries ago, a shift from an oral to a printed culture transformed human consciousness. Once, storytelling was a shared experience, with emphasis on proverb, parable and myth. With the onset of the printing press it became a more private experience, the content of that storytelling more realistic and linear.

As L.M. Sacasas argues in the latest issue of *The New Atlantis*, the shift from printed to electronic communication is similarly consequential. I would say the big difference is this: Attention and affection have gone from being private bonds to being publicly traded goods.

That is, up until recently most of the attention a person received came from family and friends and was pretty stable. But now most of the attention a person receives can come from far and wide and is tremendously volatile.

Sometimes your online post can go viral and get massively admired or ridiculed, while other times your post can leave you alone and completely ignored. Communication itself, once mostly collaborative, is now often competitive, with bids for affection and attention. It is also more manipulative — gestures designed to generate a response.

People ensconced in social media are more likely to be on perpetual alert: How are my ratings this moment? They are also more likely to feel that the amount of attention they are receiving is inadequate.

As David Foster Wallace put it in that famous Kenyon commencement address, if you orient your life around money, you will never feel you have enough. Similarly, if you orient your life around attention, you will always feel slighted. You will always feel emotionally unsafe.

New social types emerge in such a communications regime. The most prominent new type is the troll, and in fact, Americans have elected a troll as the commander in chief.

Trolls bid for attention by trying to make others feel bad. Studies of people who troll find that they score high on measures of psychopathy, sadism and narcissism. Online media hasn't made them vicious; they're just vicious. Online has given them a platform to use viciousness to full effect.

Trolls also score high on cognitive empathy. Intellectually, they understand other people's emotions and how to make them suffer. But they score low on affective empathy. They don't feel

others' pain, so when they hurt you, they don't care.

Trolling is a very effective way to generate attention in a competitive, volatile attention economy. It's a way to feel righteous and important, especially if you claim to be trolling on behalf of some marginalized group.

Another prominent personality type in this economy is the crybully. This is the person who takes his or her own pain and victimization and uses it to make sure every conversation revolves around himself or herself. "This is the age of the Cry-Bully, a hideous hybrid of victim and victor, weeper and walloper," Julie Burchill wrote in *The Spectator* a few years ago.

The crybully starts with a genuine trauma. The terrible thing that happened naturally makes the crybully feel unsafe, self-protective and self-conscious to the point of self-absorption. The trauma makes that person intensely concerned about self-image.

The problem comes from the subsequent need to control any situation, the failure to see the big picture, the tendency to lash out in fear and anger as a way to fixate

attention on oneself and obliterate others. Cry-bullying is at the heart of many of our campus de-platforming and censorship outrages.

Trolling, crybullying and other attention-grabbing tactics emerge out of a feeling of weakness and create a climate that causes more pain, in which it is not safe to lead with vulnerability, not safe to test out ideas or do the things that create genuine companionship.

The internet has become a place where people communicate out of their competitive ego: I'm more fabulous than you (a lot of Instagram). You're dumber than me (much of Twitter). It's not a place where people share from their hearts and souls.

Of course, people enmeshed in such a climate are more likely to feel depressed, to suffer from mental health problems. Of course, they are more likely to see human relationship through the abuser/victim frame and to be acutely sensitive to any power imbalance. Imagine you're 17 and people you barely know are saying nice or nasty things about your unformed self. It creates existential anxiety and hence fanaticism.

Two words loom large in this moment: trauma and equity. Trauma is living with the aftershocks of a bad event — or, more important, it is having no place to go where the aftershocks can be healed because the public conversation is unsafe. Equity is the dream of a world in which all are given equal attention and dignity. The dream is still out there, but it's receding with every vicious attack done in its name.

David Brooks is a columnist for the *New York Times*.



YOUR VIEWS

B2H will be a burden, not a boon, to Eastern Oregon

Mitch Colburn, an Idaho Power spokesman for the controversial Boardman to Hemingway transmission line, insists that demands for electricity will increase and a shortfall will exist by 2025, but my research shows that the market is not growing. Idaho power's billed sales (in all categories of customers) for the last 10 years have been essentially flat, if not declining. That's supported by reports from the U.S. government and Idaho Power's own data.

Changes in electric utilities are occurring so rapidly that most industry analysts propose "strategic positioning" as the best investment to make at this time. However, the B2H is a highly centralized, \$1.2 billion mega-project that guarantees an \$80 million dollar profit to Idaho Power and their partners' shareholders, but does not serve the ratepayers or the public. The five Eastern Oregon counties that would be crossed by the line will see irreparable environmental and cultural damages and increasing grid defections, leaving only the poorest of communities to pay the bills. Idaho Power's 12-year-old B2H plans are based on an old-school approach that has consistently ignored dramatic changes in power sources, delivery and storage.

For about a century, affordable electrification has been based on economies

of scale, with large generating plants producing hundreds or thousands of megawatts of power, sent to distant users through a vast transmission and distribution grid. Today, utility industry developments are replacing that simple model.

At the top of the list is the availability of low-cost natural gas and solar power. Generators based on these resources can be built much closer to customers. We are now in the early stages of an expansion of distributed generation, which is already lessening the need for costly and wasteful long-distance transmission.

The insecurity of a centralized transmission system is not in our best interest. If one large transmission line goes down, perhaps due to terrorism or forest fire, entire cities are blacked out and vulnerable. With distributed generation, most areas would still have power.

Ongoing price declines and technological advances in energy generation and distribution show the proposed B2H transmission line will be obsolete from the onset. Considering decreasing consumer demands and the rapid and dramatic changes in the industry, Idaho Power's self-serving efforts to support need for the B2H are neither credible nor realistic.

Contact StopB2H.org for more information.

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