Businesses voice support for cap and trade in West Coast states

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Oregon Capital Bureau

EOMG Photo/Sierra Dawn McClain

Protesters stand on the steps of the Oregon Capitol in June 2019 protesting a previous version of the cap-and-trade bill. Some businesses are urging the Oregon Legislature to pass an updated version this year.

SALEM — As Oregon lawmakers prepare to meet for the monthlong session that starts next week, Democrats' effort to limit greenhouse gas emissions is getting a public nudge from business.

Twenty-one companies and two health care climate alliances in Washington and California, authored a letter Jan. 29 to "leadership and legislators of the Pacific Coast," urging them adopt cap-and-trade programs, which they argue can promote economic growth.

Among signatories: Nike, the Beaverton-based sportswear behemoth and one of the state's largest companies. Nike supported similar legislation last year.

Several other major companies, including Microsoft, Unilever and Uber, also signed the letter, which was organized by Ceres, a Boston-based nonprofit that aims to make businesses more environmentally sound.

Despite continued support from one of Oregon's highest-profile businesses, the proposal faces the unpredictable nature of Oregon environmental politics.

Republicans in the Senate protested a similar proposal last year by leaving the state. Senate Republican Leader Herman Baertschiger, Jr., Grants Pass, won't rule out boycotting the Legislature again to avoid voting on the proposal.

The companies that signed Wednesday's letter say they support West Coast states implementing a cap on emissions and creating a system of allowances that are, simply put, permits to emit a certain amount of greenhouse gases.

California's cap-and-trade system has been up and running since 2013. Neither Oregon nor Washington has one, but each is considering legislation to implement cap-and-trade programs. Each state could link to the Western Climate Initiative, a market for allowances that includes Quebec and California.

Under a cap-and-trade program, allowances to polluters decline over time to meet emissions reduction targets. Businesses can buy or sell allowances on the market if they plan to emit more or less than they are allotted.

"From agriculture, seafood and forestry to technology and advanced manufacturing, our region is built on a diverse set of industries," the group of businesses wrote. "Carbon markets will expand economic opportunity in our region and spur innovation while protecting these sectors from climate impacts."

The companies wrote that cap-and-invest initiatives have "proven to be highly effective in reducing (greenhouse gas) emissions, while fostering economic growth and spurring innovation."

They wrote that market mechanisms help ensure that companies can reduce emissions more cheaply.

"This drives innovation and attracts investments that support the commercialization of low-carbon technologies, innovative practices to sequester carbon, and new jobs," they wrote.

Vince Digneo, a sustainability strategist at the software company Adobe, one of the companies that signed the letter, said in a written statement that a policy "must be well designed."

"We see cap-and-invest as a way to reduce emissions, to enable new, low-carbon technologies to be developed and deployed, and to generate funds that will grow jobs and economies," said Digneo. "Proposals like this help bring affordable renewable energy not only to Adobe's facilities in these regions, but also to the communities where our employees work and live, helping ensure that both businesses and people thrive in the long run."

Wednesday's letter, though, is merely one chord in what has proven to be a sonata of opinions on the proposal from private business, some fearing increased costs due to a program that penalizes emissions. Republicans say they are concerned that those costs could get passed on to consumers, particularly in rural areas of the state where per capita income is typically lower.

Last year, a group of businesses calling itself Oregon Business for Climate supported the proposal. That coalition included symbolically Oregon brands like Deschutes Brewery. But several businesses, including Deschutes, pulled out of the group after the bill became controversial in the wake of Republicans' boycott.

ONLINE

To download a copy of the letter from business supporting cap-and-trade policies on the West Coast, log on to www.eastoregonian.com

BRIEFLY

BEO celebrates 75th anniversary

HEPPNER — This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of Bank of Eastern Oregon.

The bank will be celebrating with open houses throughout the year at each of its 20 branches, starting in February. The Arlington and Condon branches will go first with celebrations held Feb. 10-14.

The bank was first founded in 1945 in Gilliam County by a group of farmers and ranchers who saw a need for a bank in Eastern Oregon.

"Our current mission hasn't changed from what our founders established in 1945," CEO Jeff Bailey said in a written statement. "We still serve the needs of our rural communities, our local markets, by providing them financial services. In some areas we're not only the only the only bank in town, we're the only bank in the county. And we take pride in that."

For more information, and to see a historical video about the bank, visit www.beobank.com.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell, File

Bank of Eastern Oregon opened a new branch in Hermiston, at 1475 N. First St., in November 2019. It is one of 20 branches in Eastern Oregon.

Gilliam and Bisbee celebrates project completion

HEPPNER — A historic building in Heppner recently underwent a massive restoration project.

The public is invited to an open house at the Gilliam and Bisbee Building. The free event is Friday, Feb. 7 from 5-7:30 p.m. at 106 E. May St., Heppner. Refreshments will be served and a special presentation is planned at 6 p.m.

Built in 1919, the Gilliam and Bisbee Hardware Co. was constructed to replace a structure lost to fire in 1918. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

Morrow County housed the public health department offices in the building's second floor until a handful of years ago. Kim Cutsforth of the Howard and Beth Bryant Foundation championed a renovation project of the building to create an event center.

For more information, contact Cutsforth at altakim541@gmail.com, 541-980-3465 or the Heppner Chamber of Commerce at 541-676-5536 heppnerchamber@centurytel.net.

Columbia Works launches summer intern program

MORROW COUNTY — The Port of Morrow, in partnership with regional industries, has launched the new Columbia Works Summer Internship Program.

An industry-led, summer work experience program, Columbia Works features paid internships, free professional development training and application assistance. Prospective interns can choose from a diverse set of opportunities that range from farming and food processing to education, business, information technology, workforce development and more.

The program is part of the Oregon Works network that has seen success in different regions across the state. Columbia Works was established to link regional employers with high school and college students who are looking to gain experience in their prospective career field.

"We believe Columbia Works is a great resource to get students the real-world experience and exposure to our industry and to see the potential career path they can have," said Kirk Jacobson, Beef Northwest human resources manager and Columbia Works steering committee member.

Columbia Works is promoting 58 internship opportunities from nine employers in its inaugural year. Applications are due by Wednesday, April 1. For more information, a list of positions available and the application process, visit www.colunbiaworks.org. For questions, call 541-481-7678.

Stocks sink on fears virus outbreak will dent global economy

By ALEX VEIGA
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Stocks fell sharply on Wall Street Friday as fears spread through the markets that a virus outbreak emanating from China will dent global growth.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average skidded more than 600 points and the S&P 500 index erased its gains for January.

Technology companies, which do a lot of business with China, led the losses. Airlines fell after Delta and American suspended flights to and from the country.

Just two weeks ago, the S&P 500 had closed at an all-time high, having climbed around 13% since early October. A preliminary trade deal signed by the U.S. and China earlier in the month eased a big source of uncertainty in the markets. Volatility was running at 12-month lows and even a dust up between the U.S. and Iran didn't rock markets.

Then came the virus outbreak in China.

Markets around the globe have sold off on concerns about the potential economic impact of the outbreak. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 5.9% this week and South Korea's Kospi dropped 5.7%. Markets in Europe declined as well. The U.S. stock market, which had calmly been setting record after record, suffered its worst January since 2016 and its first monthly loss since August.

China's stock markets reopen Monday after being closed since Jan. 23 for the Lunar New Year. A lot of pent-up selling has likely built up in the meantime.

Some funds that try to mimic the movements of Chinese indexes are still trading in the United States and elsewhere. These exchange-traded funds, or ETFs, are moving on investors' expectations for where Chinese stocks would be if markets in mainland China were still open. The Xtrackers Harvest CSI 300 China A-Shares ETF tracks an index of large stocks that trade in Shanghai and Shenzhen, for example. It's down roughly 9% since Jan. 23.

The virus has infected almost 10,000 people in just two months, mostly in China. The World Health Organization has declared the outbreak a global emergency, a designation that signals that the virus is now a significant risk to other countries and requires a global response. The death toll stood at 213, including 43 new fatalities, all in China.

"It seems like the equity market is now coming around to the realization that maybe this is something that may linger for some time," said Sameer Samana, senior global market strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

American Airlines fell 3.2% and Delta Air Lines slipped 2.4%. Apple, which relies on Chinese consumers for sales and factories for supplies, fell 3.9%. Nvidia slid 3.8% and other chipmakers slipped.

Amazon was a rare bright spot in the market Friday. The online retailer surged 7.4% after blowing past Wall Street's fourth-quarter profit forecasts. The company said Prime membership exploded 50% since it last disclosed that figure in 2018.