

Stance: Dems’ math doesn’t add up

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“We have 1% of the total U.S. emissions,” he said, and on the global scale, Oregon is a tenth of 1%. On that front, he said, the Democrats don’t have the argument to support the need for the policy.

“This will not reduce carbon, but only raise taxes,” Hansell said. “It does not make sense.”

Why the Democrats won’t budge, Smith said, is a head scratcher.

“I think those who are in the majority believe that it is their responsibility to handle this. They believe they have the staff and technical assistance to handle this,” he said.

But if the proposal is so good for Oregon, the pair of legislators said, Democrats should have the confidence Oregon voters will deliver. The voting math tends to favor the Democrats, with almost 974,000 registered voters, according to the January registration data from the Oregon Secretary of State, a bump from December 2019 of nearly 3,500.

Republicans are verging on 702,000 voters in Oregon, but they dropped 92 voters from December 2019. Nonaffiliated voters remain the second largest registration block with a little more than 960,000, an increase of more than 4,200 from the end of 2019.

If voters were to approve cap and trade, Smith and Hansell said the Democrats come out looking good.

But, they contended, Democrats also would look good if they refer the measure to the public and it fails. In that outcome, Democrats could at least say the will of the people prevailed and democracy in Oregon is strong.

Democrats in the Oregon House moved to force Republicans back to the Capitol on Thursday, issuing subpoenas to 21 state representatives that would compel them to explain their disappearing act from Salem.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said a process server has been hired to chase down wayward Republicans, although they may be out of state. If they obeyed, the representatives would have to appear before the Democratically controlled House Rules Committee on Thursday, March 5.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney, File
Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, speaks in July 2019 during a legislative panel at the Eastern Oregon Economic Summit at Hermiston High School. He is flanked by Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, and Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis. Rep. Bill Hansell also participated in the panel.

“Be prepared to testify about your unexcused absences during the 2020 regular session of the Legislative Assembly, the need for members to fulfill their oaths of office and constitutional duties,” the subpoena states.

Legislative committees, minus Republican members, have continued working on bills and policy discussions. But it’s unclear if their legislative work will result in new laws.

Smith said the bills coming out of House committees are stacking up. Were Republicans to return, Smith said their first motion should be to kick those bills back to committee for review.

“It would be extremely incompetent of me to vote on those bills without reviewing them,” Smith said. “We need to make sure what is in the legislation.”

The House also would need to prioritize the bills, he said, starting with the budget and policies related to the budget.

To date, just three bills have passed both chambers and been sent to Gov. Kate Brown to sign into law.

Both chambers, in a formality, convened for less than 15 minutes on Wednesday and adjourned.

“I wish the Republicans would understand the importance of their being here,” said President Peter Courtney, told the Senate.

One bill is aimed at honoring deceased veterans. Another would protect water rights in southern Oregon. Others would reform the state’s public defense system, boost affordable housing in

Pendleton, address school bullying, require building standards in tsunami zones and make insulin more affordable.

“So wherever you are out there, will you please come back?” pleaded Courtney.

More than 40 bills await a vote in the Senate, 38 of which the House has passed. The Senate has passed 14 bills now waiting a final vote in the House.

In the House, 118 measures await action, of which seven are ready for third reading and a vote. Another seven Senate bills are ready to come before the House for a vote as well.

Smith said the bills that need approval “weighs heavily on my shoulders.” As a senior member of the budget process, he said, he knows Oregonians have needs the Legislature needs to address. Hansell, too, said he lamented the holdup of legislation that helps everyday Oregonians.

But the two Republicans also said the people of their districts have been clear that cap and trade is the highest legislative priority.

Smith said climate policy “becomes religion on both sides of the aisle, and leadership on both sides needs to work toward middle ground.” He suggested Republican and Democrat leaders find three or four members of each party that are not so invested in cap and trade, put them in a room together and see what deal they could produce to bring the sides closer.

The likelihood of that, he said, is slim to none.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney, File
Heppner teens display signs to passing motorists during a climate change rally in May 2019 at Heppner City Park.

Minority: Supporters a vocal minority

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traditionally sustained the tribes First Foods, a list that includes berries, roots and salmon.

Sams said the advent of industrial farming may be a boon for supermarkets, but it also creates carbon emissions and threatens areas that used to produce berries and roots.

Warming rivers also threaten salmon in the Columbia River and its various tributaries.

Over in Heppner, Hunter Houck describes the local effects of climate change in terms of natural disaster and agriculture: the extended droughts that increase the prevalence of wildfires, the floods that erode soil and make it harder to plant crops, the carbon dioxide-filled atmosphere that make it easier for invasive plant species to thrive.

At 14, Houck has already organized climate change protests in his hometown and questioned U.S. Rep. Greg Walden’s position on global warming.

In an email, he had some critical words for the legislators who walked out.

“They have the option to vote against a bill. If they disagree with a piece of legislation, they should vote in opposition, but they shouldn’t make it impossible for people in favor to vote that way,” he wrote. “These legislators are turning a blind eye towards my generation, the generation who will have to suffer the consequences of their actions.”

Although organizations that support efforts to reduce climate change are much less prevalent in Eastern Oregon than they

are west of the Cascades, they do exist.

The Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition, known as EOC3 for short, was formed as a nonprofit in 2017 to educate locals on the effects of climate change.

EOC3 Chairman Dave Powell said the group meets monthly to hold discussions on climate change, and although its membership fluctuates, the group reaches about 100 people in its email list.

A retired forester with the U.S. Forest Service who was stationed in Pendleton for 24 years, Powell said his understanding of climate change was enhanced by the way he observed its effect on the forests.

“Forestry is all about the long term,” he said.

Powell said he can understand some of the Republicans legislators’ objections to the bill, he just wants them to come to one of his group’s meetings and explain their position.

Fighting climate change can be a lonely position in Eastern Oregon.

When Houck helped organize a climate protest in 2019, he noted that climate change was a “taboo” topic in town.

Electorally, Republicans dominate state and federal office in Umatilla and Morrow counties, and have long been hostile to policies like cap and trade.

Chuck LeBold of Union admits that the legislators who walked out are probably representing a majority of their constituents and that his positions on climate change firmly put him in the minority.

“It’s a small group, but

over here in Eastern Oregon it’s definitely a minority viewpoint for sure,” he said. “I just don’t think a lot of the folks have really been exposed to the other side of the issue.”

Like Powell, LeBold said he came to understand the effects of climate change by working for the U.S. Forest Service, which he retired from in 2017.

A veteran climate change activist, LeBold thinks the current cap-and-trade bill doesn’t go far enough, but it’s a good first step.

As a sovereign nation, the Confederated Umatilla tribes has presented the cap-and-trade bill as a way for the state to join in an effort the tribes are already making.

Sams said some of the tribes ongoing efforts include installing a wind turbine and solar panels at Tamastlikt Cultural Institute and electrical vehicle charging stations at Wildhorse Resort and Casino.

Before finishing her remarks to the Senate committee, Brigham said if she could put walls around the Umatilla Indian Reservation to protect its resources, she would.

But she understands that natural resources flow freely between the reservation and the rest of the country, regardless of walls, and they must be shared to ensure their survival in the era of climate change.

“We have been taught as tribal leaders that we need to protect those resources so we can live off the land, breathe the air, and drink clean, clear water,” she said. “So it’s very important to all of us. Not just the tribes, but to all of us.”

Dams: Feds say removal of four Snake River dams would do more harm than good

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approach and leadership from elected officials.”

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has voiced support for demolishing the Snake River dams.

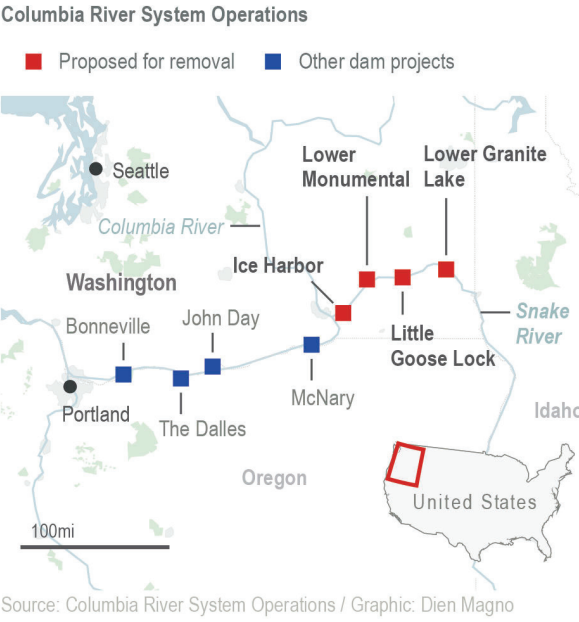
The 14 federal dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers together produce 40% of the region’s power — enough electricity to power nearly 5 million homes, or eight cities roughly the size of Seattle. They also contain a system of locks that allows cities nearly 500 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean access to Asian markets via barges that float down the massive rivers to the sea. Roughly 50 million to 60 million tons of cargo navigate the Snake and Columbia river system each year.

Yet, the towering dams have proven disastrous for salmon that struggle to navigate past them on human-made fish ladders as they swim upstream to spawn and die after spending most of their lives in the Pacific Ocean. Salmon are unique in that they hatch in freshwater streams, and then make their way hundreds of miles to the ocean, where they spend years before finding their way back to their natal streams to mate, lay eggs and die.

Snake River sockeye were the first species in the

Washington dams proposed for removal to save salmon population

A trio of federal agencies is due to publish a report that should outline whether four key dams can coexist with a dwindling Northwest salmon population.



Columbia River Basin listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1991. Now, 13 salmon runs are listed as federally endangered or threatened.

The Columbia River System dams cut off more than half of salmon spawning and rearing habitat, and many wild salmon runs in the region have 2% or less of their historic populations, said Meg Townsend, an attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity.

“The science shows that pulling out the four lower Snake River dams is the only way to save Columbia river salmon,” she said.

Townsend and other scientists also warn that Southern Resident orcas are starving to death because of a dearth of the Chinook salmon that are their primary food source.

The Puget Sound population of orcas — also called killer whales — was placed on the endangered species



AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, File
The Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River is seen from the air near Colfax, Wash.

list in 2005. A mother orca that carried her dead baby on her back for 17 days brought international attention in 2018 as their numbers have dwindled to 72 animals.

The U.S. government has spent between \$15 billion and \$17 billion on improved salmon passage over years, but nothing has changed for the salmon, True said. Yet the Pacific Northwest’s power supply and ability to use energy more efficiently have vastly improved in the past 20 years, he said.

The Bonneville Power Administration, which sells the power from the system, “is looking at a very different future than they were 10 years ago, or even five years ago,” True said.

Opponents of dam removal say they want salmon to flourish, but they

aren’t sure breaching four major hydroelectric dams will help — and it could instead damage the regional economy and the stability of the power supply.

Reservoirs behind some of the dams allow the Bonneville Power Administration to even out the more erratic power supply from wind and solar by spilling water to generate electricity on short notice. And a move away from low-cost coal plants in the Pacific Northwest has some worried about what the future could hold for ratepayers if the Snake River dams are removed, said Kurt Miller, of Northwest River Partners, which represents community-owned utilities across Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana.

“This is a much, much bigger issue than the Snake

River dams. If worldwide salmon populations are doing poorly because of climate change and carbon, does it make sense to tear out 1,000 average megawatts of carbon-free electricity?” he said.

“For so many reasons, it’s bad public policy.”

The report Friday addressed those concerns in its recommendation regarding the dams.

Hydropower generation would decrease by 1,100 average megawatts under average water conditions, and 730 average megawatts under low water conditions, the report said. The risk of a regional power shortages would more than double and the lowest-cost replacement power would be \$200 million a year, the report said. Those adjustments would increase the wholesale power rate up to 9.6%, the authors wrote.

U.S. District Judge Michael Simon ordered the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Bonneville Power Administration to revisit the impact of the hydroelectric system in 2016 while overseeing litigation over salmon.

In all, three federal judges have thrown out five plans for the system over the decades after finding they didn’t do enough to protect salmon.