

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Let the state know where you stand

The push to give cities in Oregon more leverage to decarbonize buildings got defanged in the Legislature this year. Instead, the bill got a do-over. It created a task force to look at ways to decarbonize buildings.

If opponents of Senate Bill 1518 thought they won a victory, it seems they won a delay. The task force has a list of policy options it is getting ready for the 2023 Legislature that are even more wide-ranging. Maybe legislators won't take action on all of them. But watching the options the task force is considering could be like looking into a crystal ball to see Oregon's energy future. That's especially true if Democrats continue to control the Legislature and the governor's office after November.

Electrify. Electrify. Electrify.

That's a consistent theme. Natural gas for heat, for cooking? Yes, there are voices on the task force who keep bringing up how natural gas should continue to play a role. Maybe we are wrong, but those voices sure don't seem to reflect the majority view. The task force wants renewable electricity to be king.

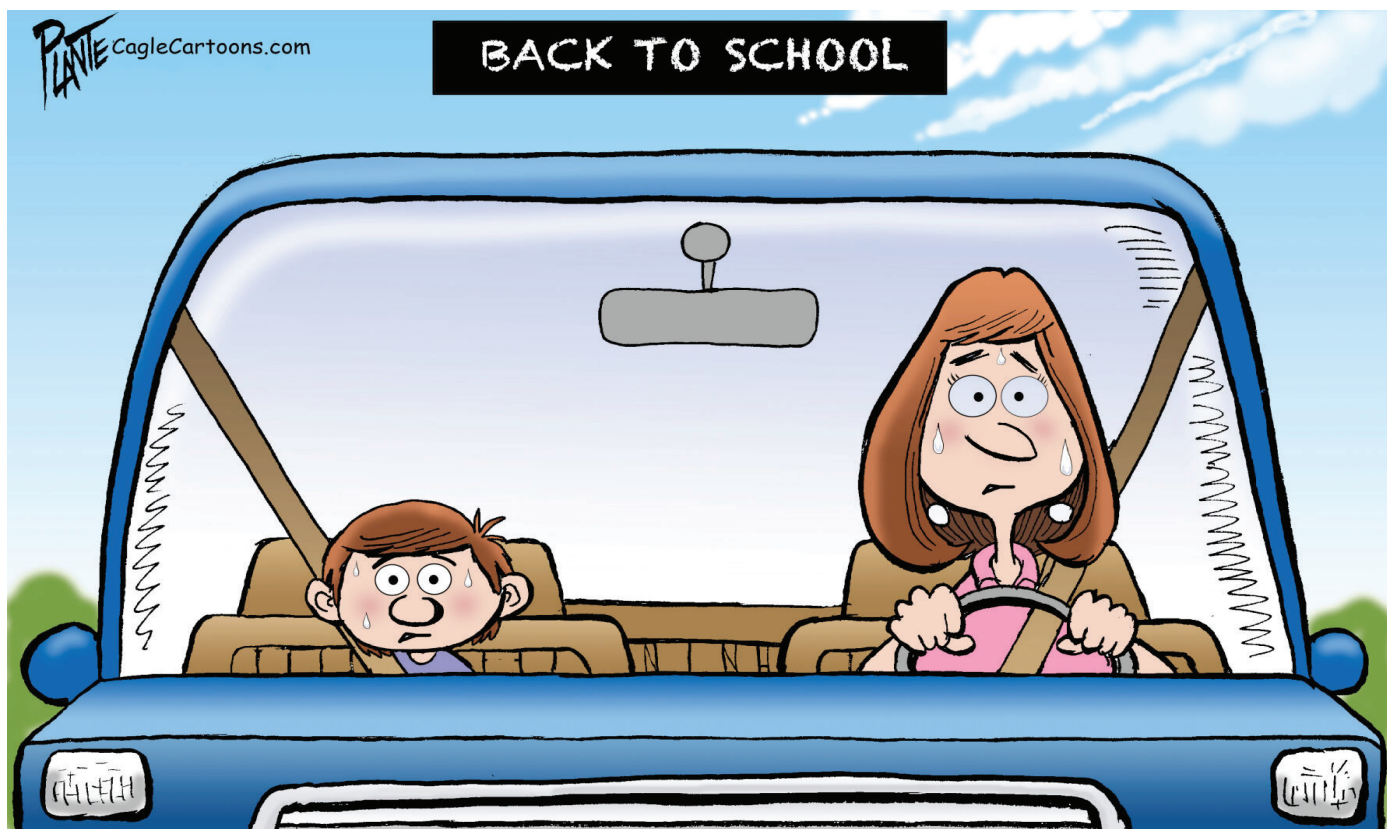
We could hear it Tuesday in the discussion about a possible new mission for the Energy Trust of Oregon. The discussion was to change its mission. The Energy Trust gets its money from customers of the big utilities and uses it to stoke energy efficiency. It is now fuel neutral. Electricity and natural gas are both OK. The proposal is to change its purpose to greenhouse gas reduction and equity. Oregon's natural gas companies may not appreciate that.

We could hear the call for the electricity focus in the discussion of electric heat pumps. Heat pumps can heat and cool. They do what they do very efficiently. Task force members talked about ways to encourage more people to install them — incentives on top of any new federal incentives or existing incentives.

There was even a discussion about the state bypassing the choices consumers or builders make for appliances in new homes and going to manufacturers and distributors. The thinking is incentives or rules could guide manufacturers and distributors to offer only options powered by electricity and that are high-efficiency. Then no "wrong" choices would be made.

Another topic that came up is to follow California's lead on requiring appliances to be "smart." Smart in this context is that appliances can schedule their use when there is less electricity demand. So maybe your car charger or dishwasher kicks itself on at 1 a.m. That could help spread out the energy demand over the day and reduce the need for peak electric capacity. Oregonians might like it, if they could control it. They might not like it if someone else was switching their appliances on and off.

What's missing in these discussions is the input of Oregonians. Yes, there are many fine people on the task force and they represent different perspectives and interests. You should take a look at the ideas on the table and tell them what you want. You can see the concepts under consideration here, tinyurl.com/Oregon081022. And you can tell the task force what you think by email here, JTFREB.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov.



YOUR VIEWS

Powerline appeals later this month

July 15, we learned from the Baker City Herald that Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett held a meeting with local landowners potentially facing eminent domain by Idaho Power's plans to build the massive 500 kV transmission line — Boardman to Hemingway (B2H). The line would cross five counties in eastern Oregon (approx. 300 miles).

First, I want to commend Commissioner Bennett. Since the beginning of this B2H saga he has fought to preserve the heritage of Baker County and the Oregon Trail, as well as retain the integrity of the tourism destination they have built — the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. Now, he is following through on a promise that he and fellow Baker County commissioners passed (via a resolution) long ago, that is, if any residents of their county were facing eminent domain that the county would do what they could to help, including filing an amicus (friends of the court) brief in support of the landowners. This latter has not occurred yet but Commissioner Bennett is demonstrating his concern and leadership. Where are the other counties' commissioners?

Second, I want to clarify a mis-statement made at this meeting. The attorney that was quoted in the article was incorrect in his statements about the B2H and

the status of the Stop B2H Coalition.

Be assured that the STOP B2H Coalition is alive, well and still fighting for the public: protecting our lands and habitats, preserving our heritage. The B2H is not a done deal. At the end of August, Oregon's Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) will be in La Grande to hear 30 appeals in the case. The procedural errors over the past two years, made by an administrative law judge, have demonstrated a bias against the public and towards the utility and their high-powered attorneys.

EFSC's final decision is expected this fall. If we do not prevail, Stop B2H intends to appeal to the Oregon Supreme Court (a judicial court). For updates and news, go to: www.stopb2h.org. Once we know the times and format of the meetings on Aug 29-31, we will post to our website and our Facebook page.

Fuji Kreider
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Attorney's perspective on OPUC seizing private land

I am an Eastern Oregon attorney and an Oregon taxpayer. I recently learned that the Oregon Public Utility Commission is creating rules to allow utilities to enter onto and seize privately owned land in Oregon without requiring compliance with Oregon's condemnation laws.

This concerns me as an attorney, because condemnation or "taking" of private land implicates landowners' legal/constitutional rights. Allowing seizures of land that violate the law will generate expensive litigation, and is highly likely to be overturned by the courts. As a taxpayer and as an attorney, I object to any waiver that will predictably result in costly litigation, at taxpayer expense, which is likely to lose in court.

Additionally, I am concerned about the extreme urban-rural divide within our state. There is substantial support in Eastern Oregon for the idea that the interests and values of Eastern Oregonians are not taken seriously by West-side politicians. Any decision by the state to ignore private landowner rights in favor of billion-dollar utility companies will only fuel the resentment of rural Oregonians who feel that their state fails to acknowledge or respect their values — particularly the rights of private landowners. I often hear my neighbors complain about this issue, and consider the political divisions in Oregon as frightening and serious. Any PUC decision to circumvent laws which protect private landowners will only deepen the divisions within our state.

The PUC should exercise common sense, and deny waivers of the law if condemnation of private land is required.

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