

Local & State

CRITICS WORRY ABOUT EFFECTS OF HIGHER FUEL AND ENERGY PRICES

Lawmakers consider carbon limits

By **George Plaven**
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon lawmakers are considering a new carbon pricing policy during this year's legislative session aimed at regulating greenhouse gas emissions in an effort to combat the effects of climate change.

The legislation, known as cap and trade, worries many of the state's farmers and ranchers about higher fuel and energy prices at a time when profit margins are already thin, while others see it as a needed step toward climate resilience.

Cap and trade was reintroduced in the Legislature on Feb. 4, with state Democrats riding a wave of momentum after winning a supermajority of 60 percent in both chambers during the 2018 midterm elections. At least one Senate Republican, Cliff Bentz of Ontario, has said the bill is all but certain to pass, though there is still time to impact the proposal.

"I think all of us are working on amendments to this bill," Bentz said.

Agricultural groups are lobbying to protect farmers and ranchers from projected hikes in fuel and energy prices.

Jenny Dresler, of the Oregon Farm Bureau, said too few safeguards are built into the bill for growers who rely on diesel fuel, gasoline and inputs made from natural gas, or who ship their products long distances.

"That's a big point for us, that a lot of rural families and farm and ranch families are going to bear a disproportionate burden of these costs," Dresler said.

House Bill 2020

The legislation, House Bill 2020, outlines a new cap and trade plan and calls for the creation of a state agency to oversee it.

Under cap and trade, the state sets a limit, or cap, on greenhouse gas emissions — such as carbon dioxide and methane — beginning in 2021. The cap would be steadily reduced until carbon emissions are 45 percent below 1990 levels in 2035, and 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

Though many details of the program are yet to be determined, companies would have to buy "allowances" for every metric ton of carbon — usually in the form of carbon dioxide — they generate in total. Only companies that emit more than 25,000 metric tons of carbon a year would be regulated, including electric utilities and natural gas and fuel suppliers.

The state would sell the majority of allowances through regular auctions, and money collected would then go toward climate-friendly initiatives across the state, such as accelerating the adop-

tion of renewable resources, weatherizing homes and thinning excess forest debris that feeds larger wildfires.

Tentatively, cap and trade would be managed by the Oregon Carbon Policy Office, though Gov. Kate Brown has proposed creating a new agency, the Oregon Climate Authority, that would replace the Carbon Policy Office and Department of Energy.

Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, is chairman of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee and co-chairman of the Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction, which is holding hearings on the bill. He said HB 2020 allows the state to address climate change while directly benefiting the state economy.

"We need to take climate action really seriously," Dembrow said. "That's what this bill does."

Senate Minority Leader Herman Baertschiger Jr., R-Grants Pass, labeled the bill "Soviet-style" government that skirts the Legislature and consolidates power in the executive branch.

HB 2020 does call for establishing a Joint Committee on Climate Action, though Baertschiger said the rules for cap and trade — and how the money will be spent — will be written by the new Climate Authority, with a director appointed by the governor.

"Once this is implemented, the Legislature is basically out of the picture," Baertschiger said. "It is a way the executive branch, on their own, can control production in the state of Oregon."

Higher costs

It is widely expected that, once cap and trade is passed, Oregon would link its program to the Western Climate Initiative, which implements similar programs in California and Quebec, Canada.

The allowances that companies must buy for emissions are estimated to cost \$16 per ton of carbon in the first year, increasing fuel prices in Oregon by 15 to 16 cents per gallon. Oregon's Carbon Policy Office estimates that cap and trade will apply directly to about 100 companies statewide.

Under the current proposal, agriculture and forestry are exempt from the carbon cap but are not immune from the effects of higher fuel and energy prices.

Dresler, with the Farm Bureau, said higher fuel costs alone could cost producers an extra \$1,000 to \$5,000 per year, depending on their consumption. Commercial fuel and dyed diesel for off-road use are not currently exempted in the bill.

Farmers are price-takers in the global market, Dresler said, meaning they have no

control over pricing and typically cannot pass on their cost increases to the consumer.

"Any of these cost increases are going to be borne by the farm families," Dresler said.

Natural gas customers would also be impacted by cap and trade, which could have a significant impact on the food processing and nursery industries.

PacifiCorp and Portland General Electric, Oregon's largest electric utilities, would receive free allowances through 2030 to account for work already being done to phase out coal generation and double their renewable energy mandate. Utility representatives said the free allowances are necessary to avoid charging ratepayers twice for carbon savings.

Gas companies, however, would not receive free allowances. NW Natural, the state's largest gas utility, calculates that rates for small commercial businesses would climb by 13 percent in 2021, 44 percent by 2035 and 60 percent by 2040.

Craig Smith, director of government affairs for Food Northwest, an association that represents the food processing industry, said processors rely heavily on natural gas to fuel their boilers. If gas rates go up, he worries that companies such as Lamb Weston could move out of the state.

"A lot of our companies already have locations in (Washington and Idaho), so they just move production," Smith said.

Tom Fessler, owner of Woodburn Nursery in Woodburn, also testified before the Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction. Natural gas is the most cost-effective fuel for heating greenhouses, he said, and there is not an adequate or inexpensive alternative.

"We cannot continue to absorb these increases, as our customers are unwilling to pay the prices needed to sustain our business," Fessler said.

Nursery and greenhouse plants are Oregon's top agricultural commodity, valued at approximately \$947 million in 2017.

Climate impact

By 2050, the Carbon Policy Office estimates Oregon's cap and trade plan would eliminate 43.4 million metric tons of carbon annually from the atmosphere.

Critics point out that amount represents just 0.12 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, which reached an all-time high of more than 36 billion metric tons in 2018. Cap and trade, they argue, would cost too much for too little benefit.

Supporters, however, say the state can no longer afford to stand by and do nothing about climate change.

"The writing is on the wall. The state is already bearing the cost for this," said Dylan Kruse, director of government affairs for the Portland-based nonprofit Sustainable Northwest. He points to more frequent droughts, which in 2018 helped fuel Oregon's most expensive wildfire season to date, topping \$514 million.

"People keep talking about the cost of action. We're past that. We have to start talking about the cost of inaction," Kruse said.

The last five years have been the hottest on record, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Average global temperatures in 2018 were just over 2 degrees higher than normal, and the U.S. experienced 14 weather and climate disasters — including wildfires in the West and hurricanes in the East — each with losses exceeding \$1 billion and totaling around \$91 billion in damages.

A study by the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute concludes that longer, hotter summers and smaller winter snowpack will likely affect day-to-day operations in agriculture, including planting schedules, pest management strategies, yields, livestock health and soil retention.

Megan Kemple, coordinator of the nonprofit Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network, or OrCAN, said more than 200 farms have signed on in support of cap and trade legislation. OrCAN was started by Kemple in 2017 to promote agricultural practices that mitigate climate change and sequester carbon.

"The farmers I'm in communication with are concerned about the impacts of climate change on their livelihoods and their businesses," Kemple said.

Ramon Ramirez, with the labor union Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, or PCUN, testified in favor of the cap and trade bill on behalf of farmworkers.

PCUN, based in Woodburn, is Oregon's largest Latino organization, representing 6,500 members. Ramirez served as president of the group until last November and now works as a policy organizer.

"In this debate of reducing carbon, we are on the front lines," Ramirez said. "Farmworkers who toil on the land to put food on the American table do backbreaking work while working with carbon and toxic chemicals."

It is no coincidence, Ramirez added, that the life expectancy for farmworkers is 49 years old compared to 78 for the general population, citing statistics from the National Center for Farmworker Health.

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School board meets Thursday

The Baker School Board will pay tribute to a community partner and honor Promise of Baker students of the month when it meets Thursday night.

Directors also will learn more about the Bal-a-Vis-X program that has helped Baker students improve their academic skills while performing Balance, Auditory and Vision eXercises.

The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall at 1655 First St.

The Board will honor Jim Tomlinson of the Baker County Community Literacy Coalition as an outstanding community partner. Students to be honored are Ella Wilde of Keating Elementary and Kileekin Kucher of Eagle Cap Innovative High School.

Special Education Director Barry Nemecek is scheduled to present information about Bal-a-Vis-X, an education program designed to help students improve academically through balance and coordination exercises. The program also promotes focus, cooperation and trains students to become peer teachers, according to Bill Hubert, who developed the program about 40 years ago and has trained students and teachers throughout the country, including those in the Baker School District.

Other business on the agenda includes information about new employees. Megan McGuinness and Robin Torres have been hired as paraprofessionals at Brooklyn Primary School. New hires under extra-duty contracts are Kristin Schwin as Baker High School head tennis coach and Robbie Langrell as BHS assistant track coach.

A report of District enrollment also will be presented. As of Feb. 4, the District showed a total enrollment of 1,675 students. That includes 528 primary students at Brooklyn, Keating and Haines, and 455 intermediate students at South Baker, Keating and Haines. The Baker Middle School enrollment is at 256 students and 419 are enrolled at Baker High School. The total also includes 17 students at Eagle Cap Innovative High School.

There are also 10 preschool students attending at Haines and four at Keating.

Baker Charter School totals include 1,827 enrolled throughout the state with Baker Web Academy and 329 enrolled throughout the state at Baker Early College.

Under action items during Thursday's meeting, the Board is scheduled to approve the District's annual audit report and to adopt a new agreement with PACE, the District's insurance carrier through the Oregon School Boards Association.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Livestock Association plans meeting

The Baker County Livestock Association will have its monthly meeting Thursday, Feb. 21, at 7 p.m. at the Sunridge Inn.

Agenda items include a presentation from Brian Harberd of MultiMin USA and Mark Holt of Boehringer Ingelheim. Bill Harvey, chairman of the Baker County Board of Commissioners, will discuss the potential impacts of House Bill 2020, the carbon cap-and-trade legislation (*see related story at left*).

Baker County Democrats meet Thursday

The Baker County Democrats will have their monthly meeting on Thursday, Feb. 21, at the Rogers Fellowship Hall, Fourth Street and Washington Avenue. Social time starts at 5:30 p.m., with the meeting at 6 p.m. All are welcome.

Dinner Friday at Eagles Club

The Eagles will have a past presidents club dinner Friday, Feb. 22, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at 2935 H St. The menu includes spaghetti, salad, garlic bread and dessert for \$7. Eagles members and their guests are welcome.

Idaho Power offers home energy audits

Idaho Power Company offers its Oregon customers who heat their homes primarily with electricity from the company a free home energy audit.

Homeowners who qualify for the audit might also be eligible for a weatherization loan or cash payment. Details are available at www.idahopower.com/save

BHS Class of '74 reunion meeting set

The Baker High School Class of 1974 has scheduled an organization meeting to help plan for its 45th reunion this summer. The meeting is scheduled for Feb. 21 at 6 p.m. at Lefty's Taphouse, 1934 Broadway St.

The reunion is set for July 5-6. More information is available by calling Kent Bailey at 541-523-4471.

— Compiled from staff reports and press releases

HEART TO HEART

Disappointed at meager turnout for major musician

I am a little shocked, a bunch confused and immensely disappointed at the meager attendance of Calvin Johnson's recent show at Churchill school? To label him as just a musician would be criminal. I am hoping anyone reading this will take the time to check out this musical legend via Wikipedia. His accomplishments and groundbreaking contributions to the modern independent music scene are immense. He did not have to make Baker City a stop on this, his most recent, tour — yet through the magic of Brian and Corrine Vegter we were blessed with a high energy performance of "Calvin music." He was backed by an incredibly talented three-piece band. Calvin's unique vocals

and dancing antics, combined with their sound, made you smile and forced your body into movement. I could sense this was a group that usually played to full (even sold out) venues. I am not sure the reason for such sparse attendance? The advertising was fantastic, thanks in big part to the cover of GO! magazine and the Herald. This, along with fliers, posters, facebook and Brian's regular podcast left no doubt that an important artist was coming to town. Baker's very own Shannon Gray followed Calvin's performance with a set of her folksy, bluesy originals, her accomplished guitar work accompanying her magnificent voice. Both artists gave their all, as if the house was standing room only, a testament to their professionalism.

So here I am, once again, worried

about losing important local treasures and assets through lack of community participation. I admit I am a bit selfish in that way but if we can "all" help grow and support positive enterprises and happenings in our community the benefits will also grow and be spread to "all." Just as we can't afford to lose our unique We Like em Short film festival neither can we ignore the world class musicians and artists that the Vegters are bringing to Baker City.

Some facts about the Churchill musical venue: great acoustics, huge dance floor, most always family friendly, food, wine and beer, early performances ...

Things unattended soon go away.

Peace.

Mike Meyer
Baker City



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