

Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Legislature can affect agriculture

Agriculture is big business in Oregon. Statistics from the Oregon Department of Agriculture help build a picture of the scope:

The state has 37,200 farms and 16 million acres in farmland;

Oregon produces \$1.8 billion in agricultural exports;

And Oregon is also the No. 1 producer in the country of hazelnuts, many types of seed, Christmas trees, blueberries and rhubarb.

So what the Oregon Legislature will do in the 2020 legislative session that will alter agriculture is also a big deal. The Capital Press recently outlined some of the bills that are expected to change the agricultural economic outlook.

Chief among the changes will come in the proposed carbon cap legislation. Agriculture is almost always rural, which usually means added travel distances. And it also means machinery that runs on fuel is used to grow, tend and harvest crops. An increase in gasoline, diesel and natural gas prices means an increase in the cost of doing business.

One proposal floating around the Legislature is that the carbon cap bill would gradually implement increased fuels costs in the state, starting first in the more metropolitan Portland area. In a few years, it would cover the whole state. That would give the rural parts of the state more time to adapt before price increases hit. But the price increases will still hit.

The state's new corporate activity tax is another area of concern for agriculture. Basically companies bringing in more than \$1 million in Oregon have to pay \$250 plus 0.57% of those revenues in tax. The law gets tricky when it comes to crops taken to wholesalers. The crops that are sold out of state are not subject to the tax. The crops sold in state are. So once the grain is loaded into an elevator how is that to be tracked?

Water rights are always a concern for agriculture. The Oregon Farm Bureau is watching a possible change. Under the law, an order to stop the flow to a junior water rights holder can at least be delayed while it is appealed. Senior water rights holders and tribes want that changed. Legislators won't have an easy time resolving that dispute or any of the other changes that will impact agriculture this session.

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Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Letters are limited to 350 words. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days. Email letters to news@bakercityherald.com.



A list of 2020's likely top issues

As we head into the new year and the kickoff to the Roaring '20s 2.0 (and they will roar), policymakers will be faced with some incredibly important decisions. Several issues will take center stage, ones with the potential to significantly shape our future, from immigration reform to college loan debt.

Certainly one of the biggest will be the Senate impeachment trial of President Trump. Although the outcome is nearly certain — there aren't enough votes to remove the president from office — the issue will steal the air from other issues until the trial is concluded.

Post-trial, here are some issues likely to dominate 2020. Each represents a fork in the road, and the direction the nation chooses will be critical:

IMMIGRATION

President Trump could roll out a new immigration plan as we head toward the elections. In addition to trying to secure more funding for desperately needed border security, a part of the plan could include another attempt at creating a merit-based legal immigration system, rather than one that's based primarily on family ties.

A system that favors applicants with desirable job skills would shift legal immigration's focus from being centered on the desires of immigrants to being centered on the needs of the American people and our economy.

A merit-based system also more easily allows "patriotic assimilation," creating a more unified nation (rather than one divided into special-interest groups based on where we came from).

ELECTION INTEGRITY

With the 2020 elections coming, citizens must be assured that the electoral process for federal, state and local elections is fair.

Although many on the left deny it, voter fraud exists. Even the Supreme Court has noted that voter fraud is a clearly documented part of our nation's

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history. Unfortunately, politicians and advocacy groups on the left continue to fight laws that require an ID to vote. They've even sued states that have tried to purge voter rolls of people registered in multiple jurisdictions who could vote more than once in an election.

Moreover, the push to eliminate the Electoral College would increase the influence of large urban centers at the expense of small states and rural areas, striking at our constitutional structure that balances the rule of the majority with protections for minority interests and state governments.

EDUCATION

Politicians have floated proposals of free college tuition for all and loan forgiveness for everyone carrying college debt.

Characterized as "investments in our future," the reality is they would be a suffocating financial burden on every taxpayer, especially middle- and lower-income citizens. There's also an inherent unfairness to forcing Americans who couldn't afford to go to college themselves to pay off the loans of those who could.

One also has to question what kind of return taxpayers would get for their "investment." Many colleges are indoctrinating students into a socialist, "America is evil" ideology, and often students graduate unprepared for a career and unable to pay off the enormous college debt they accumulated. Forty% of those who start college don't even finish within six years.

Despite these issues, because federal loan money is handed out with little scrutiny as to students' ability to pay it back, colleges have had free rein to raise prices at rates often double that of inflation. In addition, more

than a million people default on their loans annually, leaving taxpayers to pick up the tab. "Free" college tuition would only make things worse.

CHINA

Under the brutal governance of the Chinese Communist Party, China presents a combination of risks our nation has never before faced.

Chinese authorities direct attacks on our government cyber networks, steal the intellectual property of our companies, and threaten the travel of ships and planes over international waters. The authoritarian regime is also spending enormous amounts of money to build up its offensive military machine.

As U.S. policymakers start to pay more attention to China's threats, we can expect to see more recommendations for rebuilding America's military to keep China's in check.

Moreover, while the national security threat is very real, because so many raw materials and finished goods come from China, the U.S. will continue attempting to build more positive trade relations with the country. Besides being good for Americans economically, a better trade relationship also serves as a deterrent to Chinese aggression, since there's little incentive to attack a major market for its goods.

What we do about any one of these issues in 2020 — China, electoral integrity, education, or immigration — could represent a major turning point for America. From safeguarding the right to vote, to protecting the nation from foreign aggression, to deciding whether more taxpayer money is the solution to rising college debt, the new year will certainly provide several opportunities to make pivotal decisions about America's future.

Kay C. James is president of The Heritage Foundation (heritage.org).

Your views

In verse, why I'm averse to Verizon's cell tower

Wish I had never seen nor ever saw
This thing that's worse than your mother-in-law
Verizon's back with cards up their sleeve
Tangling more web than what they weave
Twice now planning has turned them down
A 70-foot tower will damage our town
Appealing to the council to build a tower
Verizon's gonna be flexing their power
For Verizon a 50-foot tower isn't plenty
But now they're adding an extra 20
If the city council doesn't vote

them a "no"
There's no end to where this path will go
They insist their towers will look like trees
But who has seen trees like these?
A tree that looks like a Lego toy
It's just a cheap techno ploy
What do they care what's on the horizon?
They don't have to: they're Verizon
The time is ripe to take a stand
Because who here wants to live in Lego Land?
Poems are written by fools like me
But only God can make a tree
Not you Verizon.

Whit Deschner
Baker City

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

State Sen. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-301, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. District office: P.O. Box 1027, Ontario, OR 97914; 541-889-8866.

State Rep. Lynn Findley (R-Vale): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in

Council Chambers. Mike Downing, Loran Joseph, Randy Schiewe, Lynette Perry, Arvid Andersen, Ken Gross and Doni Bruland.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Ray Duman, police chief; John Clark, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Jeff Smith, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

Baker School District: 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Andrew Bryan, Kevin Cassidy, Chris Hawkins, Katie Lamb and Julie Huntington.