

EDITORIAL

Unity
in Salem

The trucks rolled into Salem Thursday morning, the vehicles representing people who have jobs and pay taxes that make possible all manner of government services.

Including the very pavement over which the rigs rolled.

They came to the state capital in their hundreds to make a point that Oregon lawmakers seem to struggle to understand as they pursue the laudable goal of reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that are responsible for climate change.

That point is that although Oregon's contribution to this global problem is minuscule — on the order of one-sixth of 1 percent of global carbon emissions — the likely effects on the state's residents and taxpayers are significant.

It's that lack of balance between the benefits and the negative effects that led to the Timber Unity movement last year. It's a movement that's obviously still strong, based on the turnout for Thursday's protest in Salem.

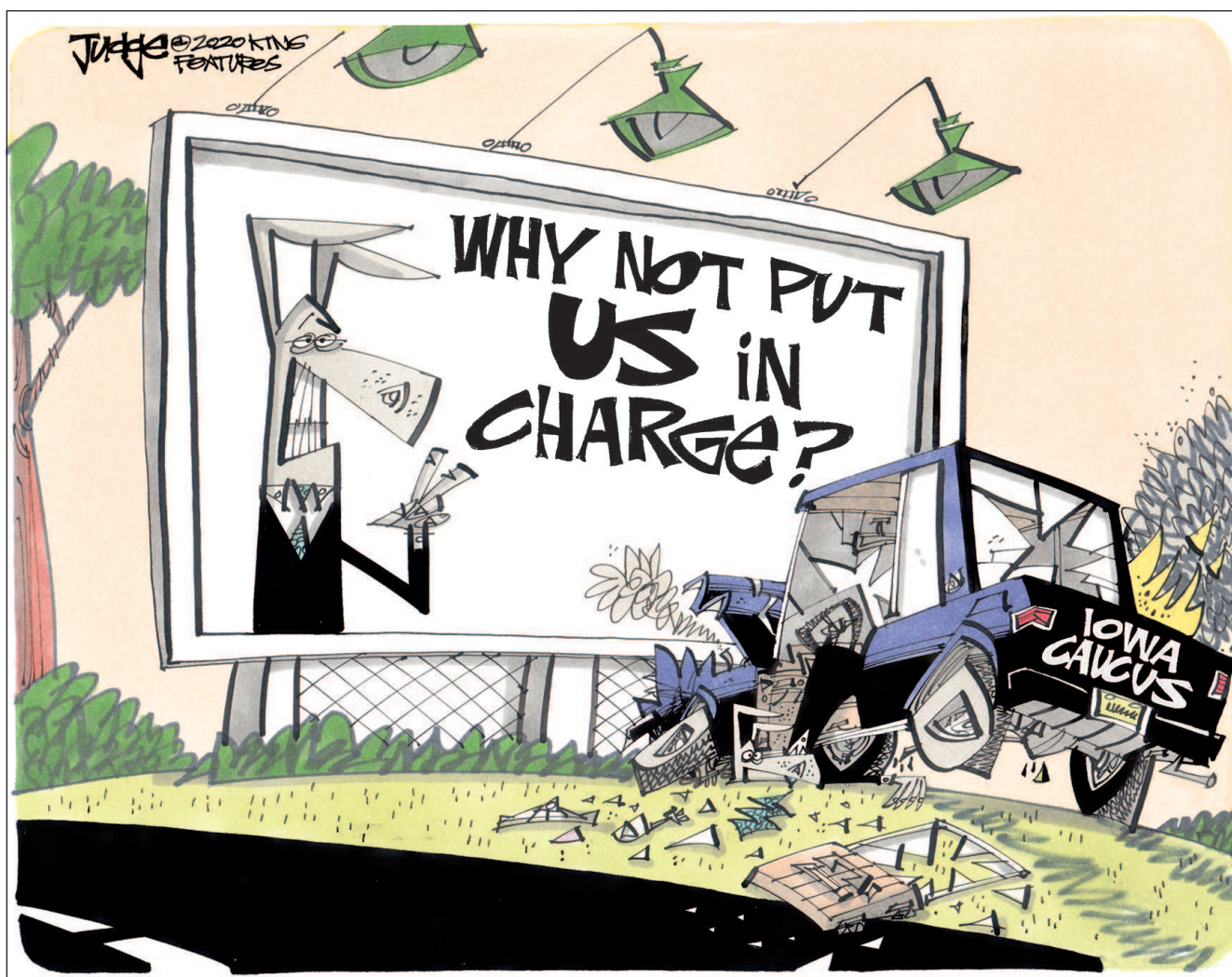
The newest version of the emissions bill that failed in 2019 — after a group of Republican state senators left the state to deny the Senate a quorum (the House passed the bill) — isn't as onerous as the original.

The bill under consideration in Salem now — Senate Bill 1530 — would, among other things, exempt Baker County and the rest of Eastern Oregon from the increase in fuel prices that the Legislative Revenue Office says would result from the bill's passage.

But some legislators contend that even the modified version would siphon hundreds of millions of dollars from Oregon's economy into state coffers. And although proponents tout the ways this money could be spent — job training in renewable energy industries for displaced workers and loans to manufacturers to reduce emissions, for instance — there is no guarantee that these programs would replace lost jobs.

The complexities of this legislation are reason enough for the Legislature to drop the bill from the current session, which is limited to 35 days. Proponents also have the option of taking their case directly to voters in the form of a ballot measure.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Trump ignores reality of America's economy

Adjusted for inflation, working-class wages in the United States are little-changed over the past 45 years, while the cost of living has greatly increased, and the super-rich have soaked up enormous gains in wealth.

Many workers have lost their wage-bargaining power.

This sorry situation is due to a fundamental structural revolution, where computer automation has cut jobs in most industries and many occupations — and continues apace today.

All this has escaped the attention of President Trump, who boasted of a strong economy in his State of the Union address. While touting a low unemployment rate and a record-setting stock market for the wealthy, he falsely proclaimed that: "Incomes are soaring. Poverty is plummeting," and "Our families are flourishing." And he slyly asserted that "Real median household income is now at the highest level ever recorded."

These grandiose examples are but a few of Trump's false, exaggerated, and deceptive statements of the evening, and I believe they viscerally contradict the personal experience of over 40 percent of working families in Baker County who cannot make ends meet.

In the Democratic response, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer stated,

Letters to the editor

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"It doesn't matter what the president says about the stock market. What matters is that millions of people struggle to get by or don't have enough money at the end of the month after paying for transportation, student loans, or prescription drugs."

I say, let's follow Gov. Whitmer's lead and demand honest and meaningful policies that counteract the dreadful state of today's economy — policies like substantial federal income subsidies, as proposed by presidential candidate Andrew Yang with his \$1,000 per month per person "Freedom Dividend."

Our self-serving president cheats and lies about almost everything, even golf! But, together, we can join Speaker Nancy Pelosi, rip up his divisive campaign-style speech, and, starting in January, 2021, move forward with a new administration for us all, based on truth, reality and our own innate creativity.

Marshall McComb
Baker City

Newspapers have to charge for their products too

I was flipping through The Herald's social media today, and couldn't help but notice a group of residents posting angry comments when they weren't allowed full access to articles for free. The newspaper is a company with expenses like any other company, and it creates a product that consumers need to pay for ... if the company wants to meet that overhead.

To the gas station manager: Would you let that driver whose tank you've just filled up drive away without paying for it? And to the housewife: Are you entitled to a cart full of free groceries at the store just because you want it? No? Then why is The Herald's product any different? If you want the benefit of someone else's efforts, compensate them for it.

Kerry McQuisten
Baker City

Government ties vinyl wrap in lots of red tape

When you write about government inefficiency you risk indulging in cliché, and I strive to avoid the pitfall of predictability.

But sometimes the urge, ever lurking, erupts into compulsion.

A while back I was going through the information packet for the Baker City Council's Dec. 10 meeting. The item titled "Public Art Vinyl Wrap" caused me to pause in my perusal, mainly because I associate the term "vinyl wrap" more with preserving leftover tuna casserole than with public art.

The explanation, though, was simple enough.

The idea is to gussy up functional but not especially fetching items — traffic signal control boxes seem to be a favorite canvas — with paintings, photographs or other artwork that has been rendered on vinyl.

The resulting piece of work is then wrapped around the box, having no effect on its operation but adding a bit of flair to the scene.

The concept is elegant. Besides transforming humdrum objects into attractive ones, these vinyl wraps, from what I can gather, tend to discourage graffiti.

But as I scrolled past that item on the Council's agenda I was surprised by how many swipes of my finger on the Apple Magic



JAYSON JACOBY

Mouse were required to get to the next one.

What occupied this considerable digital expanse is an "intergovernmental agreement" between the city and the Oregon Department of Transportation, a document that had to be prepared before any vinyl is wrapped.

This agreement, prepared by ODOT, sprawls across six pages.

This seems to me rather more documentation than ought to be necessary to make possible what is a pretty simple and straightforward action.

According to a staff report that accompanies the agreement, city and ODOT officials have already dealt with the most obvious issue, which is ensuring the artwork doesn't interfere with the signal box. Naturally neither party wants to turn traffic lights into something resembling a disco ball, with the attendant rash of fender-benders.

I daresay the amount of ODOT employee time required to produce this agreement exceeded the \$600 the city expects the vinyl wrap to

cost.

I'm not suggesting this is an egregious waste of tax dollars.

I doubt any overtime was expended. And whatever other tasks the agreement's authors would have done otherwise probably wouldn't have had any noteworthy benefits to the public.

Yet as an example of the volume of paperwork the government — in this case at the state level — produces for even mundane actions, the vinyl wrap agreement strikes me as illustrative.

Among the 13 "agency obligations," for instance (the agency in this case is the city; it's not clear why ODOT can't just refer to the city as the city throughout, as I've managed to do), No. 12 deals with the "federal, state, and local laws, regulations, executive orders and ordinances applicable to the work under this Agreement."

You can begin to appreciate the scale of the problem.

If I've done the math correctly, we're dealing here with 12 separate levels of potential oversight — three rungs of government (federal, state and local) each with four types of possible controls (laws, regulations, executive orders and ordinances).

That list seems plenty comprehensive.

Except obligation No. 12 goes on to cite six state statutes (by number only, fortunately; had the statutes been printed in their entirety the agreement probably would have been four or five times as long), as well as three federal laws, among these the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

What the Civil Rights Act might have to do with wrapping vinyl art around a traffic signal box I can't offhand imagine, but there you have it.

Yet the city's potential obligations don't end there.

No. 12 also mandates that the city (or the agency, if you prefer ODOT's nomenclature), in addition to complying with those three federal laws, also adhere to "all regulations and administrative rules established pursuant to the foregoing laws."

That phrase goes a long way toward explaining why government is awash in verbiage.

The onslaught of words isn't limited to the laws themselves — although the drafters of most laws rarely use three or four words to deal with a matter if they can figure out how to cram in two dozen.

Laws, especially at the state and federal level, rarely can stand on their own. They need to be propped up by other documents — typically the "administrative rules" cited

in the ODOT agreement — that explain how the law will be carried out. Oregon, for instance, has both the ORS — Oregon Revised Statutes — and the OAR — Oregon Administrative Rules. If you printed the whole of both you would need a dump truck to move the resulting stack.

(And you might well want to drive that truck to its usual destination, that being the landfill.)

But we're still not quite finished with obligation No. 12.

Although the previous references to laws, administrative rules and regulations seem to me generic enough to convince city officials that they had better plan to comply with pretty much anything the state or federal government has ever considered important, No. 12 concludes with what is, if possible, an even more encompassing mandate. The city must also heed "all other applicable requirements of federal and state civil rights and rehabilitation statutes, rules and regulations."

Just in case, you know, city officials were tempted to try to slip through some loophole and get up to some dickens under the guise of gussying up a traffic signal control box.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.