

EDITORIAL

# Cap and trade should go to voters

Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek, Senate President Peter Courtney and some other Democrats in the state Legislature are accusing Republicans of failing to do their jobs by leaving Salem to deny the Democrats the quorum they need to vote on a carbon cap and trade bill.

The complaint is predictable (GOP lawmakers walked out last year for the same reason).

But it rings hollow.

The implication is that the GOP lawmakers are violating their oath and shortchanging their constituents.

In a joint statement, Kotek and Courtney said: “The only job required of a legislator as specified by the Oregon Constitution, and thus captured by our oath of office, is to vote on legislation. Once again, we urge the absent Republicans to return to the Capitol and make their voices heard by voting, rather than continuing this government shutdown.”

That sounds reasonable, as it suggests that the Democrats merely want their Republican colleagues to show up and vote.

The reality, though, is that because the Democrats have a supermajority, Republican votes are irrelevant. The almost inevitable result, should Republicans return, is that Democrats could pass the controversial carbon bill, which would boost prices for gasoline and other sources of energy.

Indeed, the only way for Republicans to faithfully represent voters in their districts who oppose the carbon bill is to stay away from the Capitol and prevent the bill’s passage.

And opposition is widespread, especially in Eastern Oregon and other rural parts of the state. Elected commissioners from at least 24 of Oregon’s 36 counties, including Baker, have passed resolutions opposing the cap and trade bill.

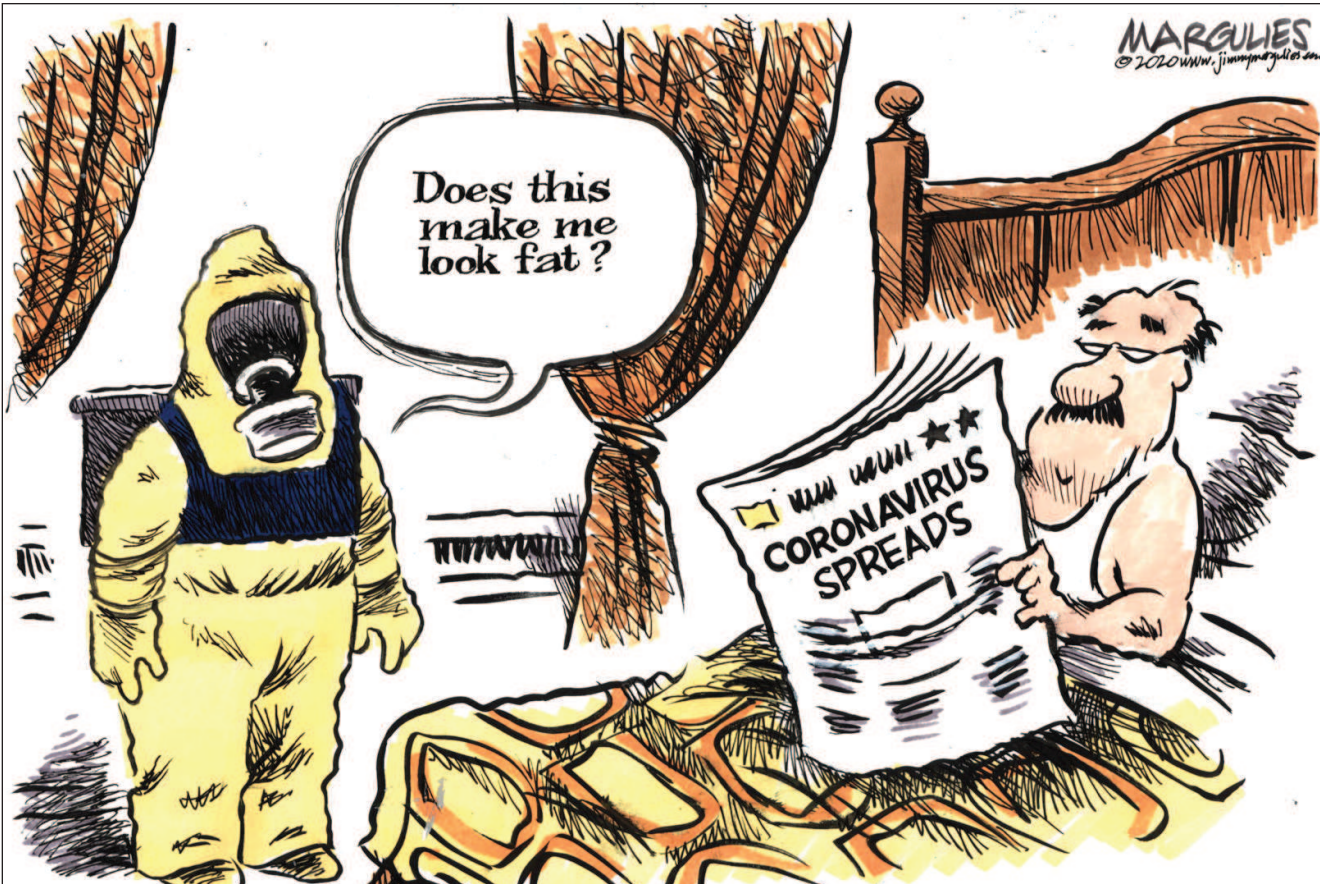
There is, of course, one vote that Republicans can’t prevent — a statewide vote of Oregonians.

Nor do GOP lawmakers want to — in fact, they have tried to persuade the Democratic leadership to put the carbon measure on the ballot. The Democrats have refused to agree to do so.

The issue here is not whether Oregon ought to scrap its representative government in favor of direct democracy. We elect legislators to make laws, and in most cases that’s the appropriate process. But it’s also appropriate, in cases of legislation such as cap and trade that could have such dramatic effects on the state, to let voters decide. Indeed that’s an integral part of Oregon’s political tradition, in the form of citizen-led initiatives as well as referendums that originate with the Legislature.

The Republicans’ refusal to be rendered irrelevant by the Democrats’ supermajority is more reasonable than the Democrats’ refusal to trust Oregon voters.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

## Middle America needs more than a small investment in its future

**Editorial from The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:**

Appalachia needs something akin to a Marshall Plan, not a pittance.

The people of Appalachia and Middle America feel excluded from the conversation about their destiny. A feeling of hopelessness persists. Regions that once hosted bustling steel mills, auto plants and coal mines now house desolation and shuttered main streets.

Families cannot stay together because the young people must leave to find work. This only adds to the pain — because family counts in Middle America.

The piecemeal approach to tackling the persistent problems of Middle America in the past five decades is a study in failure. Misery and desperation have come to define communities with poverty, high unemployment and crumbling infrastructure. The poverty rate in Appalachia, for example, hovers around 17% but is much higher in dozens of counties.

A comprehensive plan and massive investment in Appalachia and Middle America would offer hope. The effort deserves dedicated leadership at the Cabinet level. The Marshall Plan turned around a devastated Europe after World War II — it can be done.

Where could funding be found for such a program?

Washington spends billions on other countries every year in foreign

aid programs. The United States sent \$32 billion overseas in 2019.

Appalachia got \$177 million from the Appalachian Regional Commission. That is only one example. If the political will existed, if Washington cared, something could be done.

More than 50 years ago, President Lyndon Johnson declared the War on Poverty. That war, placed in the hands of so-called experts and government bureaucrats, failed to help the 420 counties constituting Appalachia.

We know what does not work. Despite the good intentions behind the Appalachian Regional Commission, it has provided no real solutions. A prime example of the policy of benign neglect can be found in an ARC press release Feb. 12 touting \$3.3 million in “investments.” People in Appalachia know those crumbs amount to nothing. Washington doesn’t get the magnitude of the problem.

Importantly, developing a plan must include input by the people of Middle America. Things have been left to the experts long enough. The Network organization, a Catholic lobbying group focused on social justice issues, hosted rural roundtables through 2019 and the beginning of this year. At the roundtables in 16 states — in places like Oil City, Pennsylvania, and Tiffin, Ohio — residents voiced a feeling of being neglected and misunderstood, their concerns dismissed by outsiders and by the

public officials elected to represent them.

Participants said solutions to their problems needed to be rural and community solutions.

Solutions to keep hospitals and clinics open in rural areas. Solutions encouraging entrepreneurs to move into distressed communities and support for residents who own and operate their own businesses. Solutions that bring better-paying jobs, not big-box retailers paying minimum wage, so that families can stay together.

Shrinking tax bases are starving basic services in Appalachia and Middle America — services like police, firefighting and schools. An infusion of federal money could save the foundations of rural communities.

For the Washington Beltway establishment, the decades-old answer is the same — throw them a few million for infrastructure projects every year via the ARC. It’s not enough.

It is time for real investment in Appalachia and Middle America to begin. What’s needed is a comprehensive plan, utilizing every department of government, to rebuild infrastructure, retrain workers, keep essential services functioning and encourage redevelopment of the economy.

A targeted investment of federal dollars, and a dedicated leadership implementing a well-thought out plan, could revive hope in Appalachia and Middle America.

## Working together on coronavirus

**Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:**

For the good of the country, Congress and the White House need to rise above their usual partisan sniping and name-calling and show a little unified leadership as the United States readies itself for the spread of the new coronavirus, COVID-19.

We know it will be hard, given the level of bitter polarization in Washington, but Democrats and Republicans owe it to the American people to swallow their differences. That’s what rational, responsible governments do in cases of war, natural disaster and, yes, a mass outbreak of infectious disease.

There’s a lot riding on the ability of the federal government to get things done fast to support states like California that are on the front lines fighting this new and frightening infection, which has killed more than 2,800 people, most of them in China, and has spread to 47 countries. An outbreak in the U.S. seems all but inevitable now that the first case of community transmission was discovered in Northern California on Wednesday. Transmission without a known connection to someone who is sick or traveled to a place where people are sick marks a concerning turning point

in any disease outbreak.

One thing that needs to happen now is the accelerated production of the estimated 270 million face masks needed to protect healthcare providers; another is to get working testing kits out to the states to confirm suspected cases. California, which has the most confirmed COVID-19 cases in the nation, has only a few hundred virus testing kits, according to Gov. Gavin Newsom. That’s not nearly enough when at least 8,400 people in California are being monitored for the infection because they’ve traveled to places where it is widespread.

President Donald Trump made the same point about working together during a news conference Wednesday night, when he walked back some of his recent bluster about the coronavirus being no big deal. Instead, he tried to assure the country that he and his team had things completely under control. (To make that point he waved a printout that he said was a list from the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore ranking the U.S. as the most prepared country to handle an epidemic.)

“We should be working together,” he said when asked about criticism by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) and the partisan debate

about the right amount of federal funds needed to properly prepare. Pelosi “shouldn’t be making statements like that because it’s so bad for the country,” he said.

We agree with the call for bipartisanship wholeheartedly, but we were dismayed that the president then undercut his own point by trash-talking Pelosi, Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-New York) and all of the Democratic candidates for president on whom he inexplicably placed blame for the recent stock market drops. Honestly, can he not hear himself?

Trump then announced he was putting Vice President Mike Pence in charge of the coronavirus response. OK, we’ll see whether that means an intensified focus on the problem; we hope it does. But Pence must offer better, less ideological leadership than he did as governor of Indiana during an HIV epidemic in 2015. That outbreak was traced to drug users sharing infected needles, and public health officials recommended that the state institute a needle exchange program. But Pence, a religious conservative, disagreed with the experts and delayed action until the outbreak was well underway. That resulted in 173 more infections than might otherwise have occurred, according to a 2018 study.

### Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

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