BAKER CITY Herald

Opinion

WRITE A LETTER
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EDITORIAL

Public input needed on carbon plan

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 Aug. 9 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.

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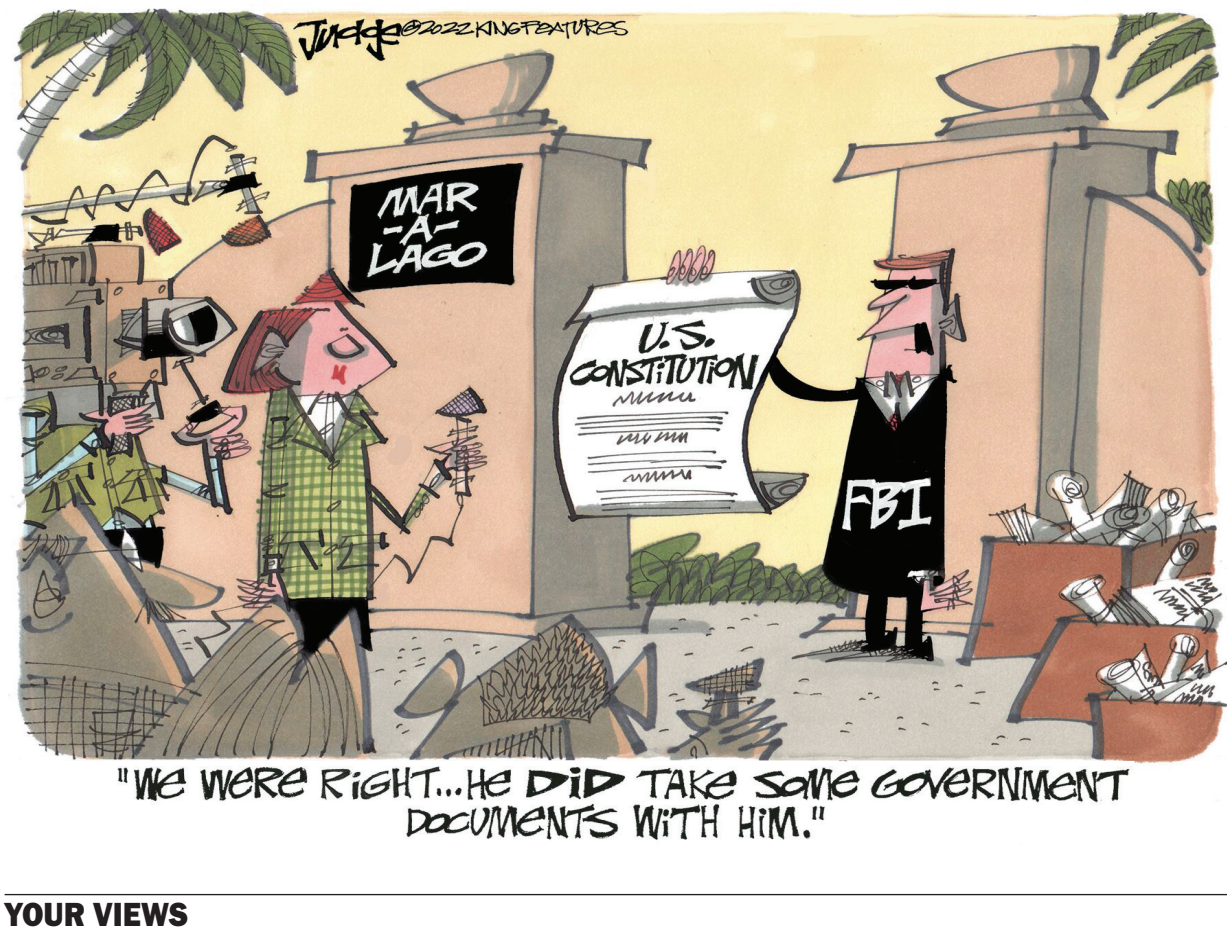

YOUR VIEWS

Oregon should not circumvent eminent domain law

The Oregon Public Utility Commission plans to disregard Oregon's regulations governing eminent domain raises huge concerns.

Eminent domain: Any governmental body, including city, county or state, can condemn property if it benefits the public, for instance, a right-of-way for a freeway. However, a private company, that benefits monetarily from the efforts to declare eminent domain, has to first have the approval of the state, county, city and/or municipality for that to happen. OPUC, as a regulatory agency, is supposed to represent the public's good, NOT serving a utility's convenience for the reason that this process "takes too long." What's with that kind of thinking? Due process does take time.

There is no valid reason to abandon or override existing regulations governing eminent domain. If so, this decision belongs in the legislature, not in an agency's rulemaking authority.

The Orlando Sentinel just published its investigation exploring the influence utility companies have over our state politics, journalism, and environmental policy.

"Utilities are powerful political players and, apparently, they have no qualms about engaging in deceptive practices, unethical practices, and, in other cases, in illegal practices," said Ari Peskoe, the director of the Harvard Electricity Law Initiative at Harvard Law School.

With that said, you must be wondering what business would spend over $200 million for an assured profit of $80 million? Idaho Power would be that business as the $200 million will be charged to Oregon and Idaho ratepayers, while the $80 million profit will benefit Idaho Power administrators and shareholders. Taking land through eminent domain must be the last resort – the last step in any development project. We, as Oregonians, should not be faced with extensive legal fees to defend our land and homes, when monopoly utilities, such as Idaho Power Company, have endless resources (most often paid by ratepayers).

Get your priorities straight and follow Oregon law and regulations!

JoAnn Marlette
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Congress needs to fix the Electoral Count Act

EDITORIAL FROM BLOOMBERG OPINION:

As former President Donald Trump desperately clung to power last year, and his agitated supporters violently invaded the Capitol, a number of flaws in the U.S. election system became all too clear. Thankfully, one of them may soon be fixed.

After months of negotiations, a bipartisan group of senators has released a set of reforms to the Electoral Count Act of 1887. In conjunction with the 12th Amendment, the act establishes a framework for casting and counting electoral votes in a presidential election and provides a process for adjudicating disputes.

Notoriously, the law's wording is inartful in crucial respects. It allows for just one legislator in both chambers to object to a state's electors if their votes were not "lawfully certified" or "regularly given," for instance, but it doesn't clearly define those terms. Similarly, while the text spells out the vice president's duties in this process, and implies that this role is purely ceremonial, it fails to explicitly rule out any more substantive decision-making powers.

Trump's multi-tiered plot to stay in power hinged on exploiting precisely such ambiguities. After Joe Biden's victory in November, one of Trump's lawyers drafted a six-page memo outlining how Vice President Mike Pence might be prevailed upon to reject legitimate votes during the certification process. Trump's campaign assembled fake slates of electors from seven states Biden had won, with the hope that Pence would recognize them instead of the real electors — or, alternatively, declare the votes from those states in "dispute" and toss them out — thereby throwing the election to Trump. Pence insisted, correctly, that he had no authority to do any such thing.

It bears repeating that those advancing this plot were not exactly rocket scientists and that no relevant legal authority would ever have gone along with it. Yet it was damaging all the same. It lent a veneer of plausibility to Trump's claims, emboldened his loyalists to storm the Capitol, and undermined faith in the broader electoral process. When Trump denounced Pence for refusing to go along with the scheme, the assembled mob called for his head.

If passed, the bill proposed by the Senate group would go a long way toward preventing a repeat of this fiasco. (Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has said the Senate will vote on the legislation after the August recess; the House still needs to take up its own version.) It clarifies that the vice president's role in counting votes is "solely ministerial." It also would require one-fifth of the members in each chamber to object to an electoral slate — making it more difficult for partisans to grandstand and obstruct the process.

Prudently, the legislation also stipulates that governors (or other officials as determined by state law) have sole authority for certifying and submitting election slates to Congress. This should head off any harebrained attempts by state legislators to submit dueling electors. If legitimate controversies arise over how a state conducted its election, an "aggrieved" presidential candidate can petition a three-judge federal panel to hear his or her complaint, and, if necessary, escalate the dispute to the Supreme Court.

For too long, the tragicomic shenanigans of the late-stage Trump administration have threatened to obscure significant defects in America's electoral machinery. Fixing the Electoral Count Act is step one toward repairing them.

COLUMN

Prepare to pay more under the so-called Inflation Reduction Act

BY KATIE TUBB

Here's the best possible spin on the staggering $369 billion in energy and climate handouts included in the Inflation "Reduction" Act: It's not as bad as last year's draft.

There's nothing to reduce gasoline and electricity bills. Nothing to increase American energy production. Nothing to spur innovation. Instead, it will increase taxes on average Americans, exacerbate inflation, hike prescription drug prices and swell federal debts.

Why? Here's a sampling of what's in that $369 billion:

• $500 million condoning President Joe Biden's abuse of the Defense Production Act to purchase things like heat pumps that people don't want.

• $750 million to hire more bureaucrats for the Departments of Interior and Energy.

• $9 billion apiece for climate agricultural programs (read: diets to reduce bloating in cows) and home electrification (because regulators are making it harder for homes to have natural gas heating and appliances).

• $27 billion for state and local governments to procure zero-emissions technology.

• $60 billion for "environmental justice," which means anything from electric Post Office trucks to whatever "educational program" a climate extremist can imagine.

The act also continues to push energy policy through the tax code by extending and expanding favors for wind and solar energy, electric vehicles and energy-efficient housing materials.

It even subsidizes nuclear power plants again, despite a similar subsidy being included in last year's trillion-dollar Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

What isn't officially accounted for in the price tag are budget gimmicks to hide even more taxpayer liability, including $85 billion for the Energy Department's existing green-energy loan programs and $250 billion for a new energy loan-guarantee program.

The last time Congress did something like this, taxpayers got Solyndra – the solar panel company that went bankrupt, forcing taxpayers to cover its $535 million loan guarantee made under the Obama Recovery Act meant to pull America out of the 2008 recession.

According to an inspector general's Solyndra "lessons learned" report, the huge influx of federal spending and intense political pressure to make renewables succeed and to show that the Obama Recovery Act was working led to "due diligence efforts [that] were less than fully effective." (Only in Washington could losing $535 million be labeled "less than fully effective.")

Have the lessons been learned? The Obama Recovery Act spent $90 billion in energy and climate programs. The Inflation "Reduction" Act would spend $369 billion.

In addition to what it spends, consider what it taxes. The act would tax petroleum imports, increase fees and rates for oil and gas production on federal lands and waters, and tax energy production everywhere with a new methane fee. Shockingly, it also negotiates down to get the Biden administration to follow existing law for energy production on federal lands and waters. The tail is wagging the dog.

Of course, all these new costs will be passed on to anyone who pays an electric bill and fills a vehicle with gasoline or diesel.

What do American taxpayers get for this "investment"? First, the act does nothing to fix root policy problems exacerbating the high energy prices that American individuals, families and businesses are suffering. More spending won't decrease energy costs, as the act's proponents claim, it only shifts higher costs to taxpayers (at best).

Second, the act is being dubbed the largest down payment on climate policy in U.S. history — one that we're told will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent. How Majority Leader Chuck Schumer arrived at that number nobody knows.

He surely made all kinds of unrealistic assumptions that electric vehicle sales will skyrocket (though they only account for 1 percent of vehicles on the road today); that the already-fragile electric grid can handle more intermittent renewables; and that energy infrastructure can be built in fewer than eight years.

Schumer may as well have picked any number, though, regardless of one's stance on global warming. If the U.S. could immediately reduce greenhouse gas emissions 100 percent, it would still only impact global temperatures, at the most, by two-tenths of a degree Celsius by the end of the century.

The Inflation "Reduction" Act makes the disturbing assumption that the only way to reduce energy prices, increase energy production and spur innovation is for Washington to do it. This displays blind overconfidence in politicians and bureaucrats – and a profound lack of confidence in the American people.

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