

OUR VIEW

# The mystery of the bills with no sponsor

We would like our Oregon legislators to join us in a whodunit. The mystery is: Help us find out who are the legislators behind certain bills.

Most bills this session or any session have a chief sponsor, maybe even a bunch of regular sponsors. They make it clear which legislators wanted their fellow legislators to consider a bill. Their names are right there on the bills.

But there is a subset of bills without any such clarity. The residents of Oregon can't know by looking at a bill who is behind it.

We went through the bills that were scheduled for some mention during the legislative session on Tuesday, Feb. 1, and found three, Senate Bills 1521 and 1522 and House Bill 4031.

SB 1521 would prohibit a school district from firing its superintendent for acting in compliance with state or federal law. This bill was introduced, at least in part, to prevent superintendents from being fired for complying with pandemic restrictions, such as masking and distance learning. It was apparently introduced at the request of the Senate Interim Committee on Education. All the members of the committee? One of them?

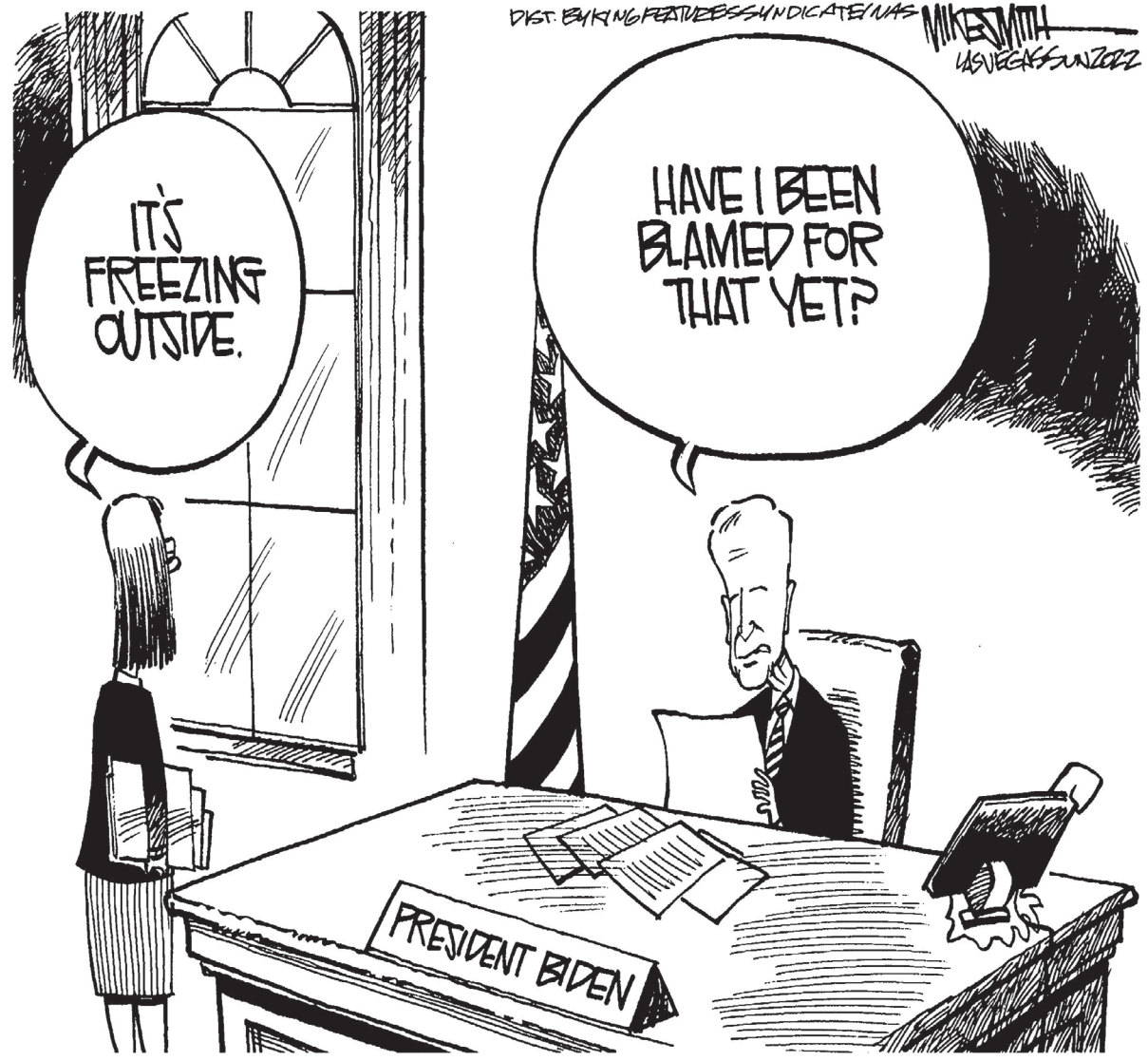
SB 1522 has so many disparate pieces it's hard to sum up. It's 20 pages long. It also has to do with education. It covers access to contact information for graduate students, requiring school districts to allow students to apply certain credits toward graduation, requirements for homeschooled students to participate in athletics and more. It was also at the request of the Senate Interim Committee on Education.

House Bill 4031 establishes a state goal that the percentage of diverse employees employed by the Department of Education reflects the percentage of diverse students in public schools. This one comes from the House Interim Committee in Education at the request of the Department of Education.

Now why would legislators allow bills to be introduced without putting a legislator's name on it? It's not because legislators are dissolute, lazy and work-shy or too busy.

It's, in part, because they can. The rules of the House and Senate allow it. It's Rule 12 in the House Rules. But legislators make those rules for introducing bills. So they must want it.

We aren't particularly worried about any of these three bills. The concern is the mystery that enables legislators to conceal what they are doing from their constituents. The power to act in hiding and set in motion new laws in secrecy is great power. And that has no place in a government that is supposed to be transparent. It has no place in the Oregon Legislature,



FARMER'S FATE

## Light shining in the darkness

Our alarms sound at 1 a.m. and we both groan and reach for our respective phones — there's no hitting the snooze button when the thermometer reads a negative number and it's lambing season.

Every two hours one or both of us head out to check the ewes and babies. Sleeping in long johns and wool socks makes it quicker to slip into coveralls and Muck boots. The air is frigid and your nose sticks together when you inhale, and if you breathe through your mouth your lungs send it back with a series of dry coughs.

The snow crystals sparkle in the flashlight beam, creating what should be a charming farmyard scene — but my eyes burn from cold and lack of sleep, and I silently curse the beautiful snow. We're partway to the barn before I realize the bottle of milk is still on the counter. It feels like we're in the first few weeks of having a newborn human baby. Your brain feels sluggish. Your muscles aching. You can't remember if you have just eaten breakfast or lunch — or maybe neither. It's the feeling of being on autopilot, in survival mode — only now the babies are outside and you're checking to make sure they haven't frozen to death.

I turn around to get the bottle while my husband continues on to check the ewes. By the time I get to the barn, I am met with a grimace and a shake of his head. One of the ewes had lambed in the last two hours and neither baby made it. It's disheartening, but not surprising in subzero temperatures. He said he'd take care of the dead babies if I'd feed the supplemental babies in the barn.

I climbed into the pen and was quickly met by an eager, black-faced lamb. She's with her mom, but her mom didn't have enough milk for twins. While I held the bottle, I watched several lambs jump on the back of their sleeping moms. I both love and hate this time of year. The



Brianna Walker

babies are so adorable, and yet each time I come to check on them, I have a feeling in the pit of my stomach that there will be a problem.

I'm just about done feeding the second baby, when my husband comes back. There's another ewe that looks like she might lamb soon. The outdoor thermometer reads -15 and she is definitely in the first stages of lambing, but there's nothing we can do at the moment, so we head back into the darkened house, where our kids, dogs and cat are sleeping soundly. We both would prefer to go to bed, but know it will be even more painful to wake up in an hour, so instead we make a pot of tea and sit. The teapot whistles. I turn it off, but by now we're both too tired to even make a cup. We just sit back down and stare out the window into the darkness. An hour passes. I'm not sure if we slept or just sat there. But too soon, it's time to go back out.

The mom has had her babies. She is cleaning one up, but the other is lying flat. We pick them both up and get them under a heat lamp, then stand back and watch. One slowly wobbles his way onto shaky legs, with his mom nuzzling him encouragingly. The other has now picked up his head. We decide to give them a bit to bond, and allow the mom to finish licking them off. Twenty minutes later, it's the same scene. His head is up but his legs look stiff. He tries moving, but it seems more like thrashing. He flops upside down, and I reach down to stand him up. His legs won't bend and his mouth is cold.

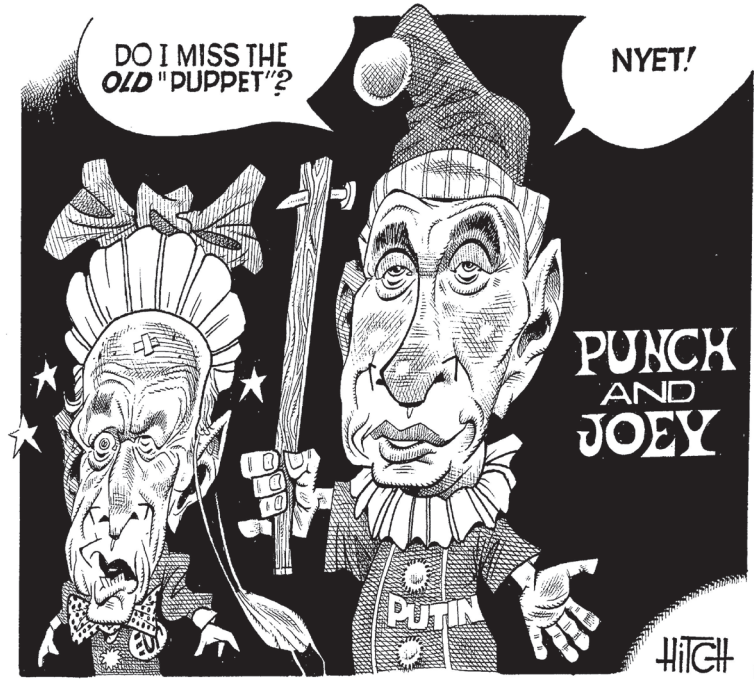
I don't have to say a word, my husband knows the routine. He heads straight to the house to fill the bathtub as I tuck the cold lamb in my arms and follow after him. An hour later, he is all dried off, lying on warm tow-

els in front of the fireplace. Once he has rallied, we take him back to his mother. But no amount of smeared afterbirth can convince her she has more than one baby. Finally, with a sigh, we pick up "Captain Celsius" and haul him back into the house to snuggle in a tote beside the fireplace. I heat a bottle of milk and my husband heads off to wash off the afterbirth. I have just snuggled the baby on my lap when my husband groans loudly from the kitchen, "There's no water."

The baby didn't drink well, but I got enough down him that I was satisfied he wouldn't die in the next few hours. Then we again don our coveralls and set off to assess our water situation. The pressure tank has frozen, and three of our frost-free hydrants have cracked. That means no water for our animals. While I'm holding the flashlight for my husband as he puts a heater in the pump house, I check the weather. A high wind advisory has been issued. I have this crazy, sleep-deprived urge to laugh. Farm life is knowing the deck is stacked against you before you even get out of bed, but you still wake to your alarm, put on your boots, and see it through no matter what. It's a blessing and a curse. And right now, kneeling next to a husband whose eyes are just as bloodshot as mine, with potentially cracked water pipes, less than three hours of nonconsecutive sleep, a bumper lamb beside the fireplace, and no morning coffee in sight, I can't contain the giggle anymore.

"This is exactly why I didn't want to marry a farmer — and it's exactly why I did." He looks at me like lack of sleep has finally gotten to me. But it's true. Agriculture can take you to the highest peaks of joy, and sometimes the darkest depths of despair (often in the same day). But without the darkness, you would never know the light.

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle



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OTHER VIEWS

## We need more education options

Jan. 23-29 was National School Choice Week, a 50-state celebration of opportunity in K-12 education. Every January, tens of thousands of independent events and activities draw attention to the ways school choice brings quality education to millions of students.

School Choice Week provides free, practical resources year-round on its website to help families looking for options in their states. Resources specific to Oregon can be found on National School Choice Week's website at [schoolchoice-week.com](http://schoolchoice-week.com).

During the past two years, increasing numbers of parents have "voted with their feet" for school choice. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, 8.7 million children



Kathryn Hickok

switched from public to private schools nationwide. Between the last two school years, charter school enrollment in Oregon increased 20.8%, and the number of Oregon homeschooled students increased 73%.

Oregon's education policies should value all options that empower students to learn successfully, and parents should be free to choose the best fit for their children.

Oregon can expand educational opportunity in many ways. We could lift the cap on charter school enrollment; let state education fund-

ing follow the child, thus funding students rather than systems; and remove regulatory barriers to the GED test, so high schoolers can more easily demonstrate graduation-level proficiency.

As education in Oregon moves forward from the pandemic school closures, we can serve all students better through educational choice.

Kathryn Hickok is executive vice president at Cascade Policy Institute and director of Cascade's Children's Scholarship Fund-Oregon program. CSF-Oregon has provided private scholarships worth more than \$3.5 million to lower-income Oregon children to help them attend tuition-based elementary schools since 1999.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Runaway inflation or misplaced values?

To the Editor:

Thirty years ago a man was murdered in John Day. A \$1,000 reward was posted for information that might

bring the killer to justice. The crime went unsolved. About the same time a Forest Service facility near Starr Ridge was blown up. \$5,000 was the reward offered on who may have destroyed an outhouse. The disparity of reward amounts concerning the value of a person's life and a crapper

was talked about.

Recently a wolf was found dead. \$16,500 is the reward on who may have killed an apex predator. Is this inflation in action or a case of skewed values?

Dave Traylor  
 John Day