

Will House Democrats find low-carbon courage?: Editorial

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The low carbon fuel standard would raise fuel costs by up to 19 cents per gallon without spending a penny on roads. The money would subsidize alternative fuels for use in cars like this electric Tesla, above. *(AP Photo/Al Behrman)*

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Killing SB324 in the House will require the votes of roughly half a dozen Democratic members

Senate President **Peter Courtney talked a good game** recently about the importance of doing the hard work and taking the "hard votes" this session to pass a funding package for Oregon's crumbling transportation infrastructure. Weeks later, the chamber over which he presides approved a divisive and costly piece of legislation that would blow a crater in the Legislature's road to a transportation package. Courtney, champion of the hard vote for transportation, sided with the crater caucus.

The divisive legislation, **Senate Bill 324**, is now working its way through the House, where Democrats enjoy a 10-seat majority. The bill would, the state estimates, raise fuel prices by up to 19 cents per gallon without spending a penny of that on roads. That money, instead, would be poured into the low-carbon fuel industry, the intended result being a slight reduction in the "carbon intensity" of the state's road fuels over a 10 year period.

More than a handful of House Democrats, particularly those who represent rural areas and reasonably competitive districts, must be wondering how they'd explain their support for such a policy jalopy to their constituents during the next election. One way to avoid such problem is to vote "no."

Both supporters and opponents of the bill undoubtedly are concerned about global warming. Both sides, however, are capable of doing the math. Oregon accounts for less than seven tenths of 1 percent of the nation's carbon dioxide emissions, and the United States is responsible for less than 20 percent of the global total. Shaving a tiny slice of Oregon's emissions will have no discernible effect on the climate, yet the cost to Oregonians will be significant. To put that 19 cents per gallon in perspective, the state's gas tax currently stands at 30 cents per gallon.

Polling indicates that **Oregonians, for good reason, do not support the low carbon fuel standard**, which SB324 would put into full effect. Combine this with the lingering taint of Oregon's former first couple, whose questionable conduct included their pursuit of the program, and you have to wonder why more lawmakers aren't fleeing from this bill. Chalk it up, we suppose, to the power of interested environmental organizations, as projected by the Legislature's Democratic leadership.

In any case, killing SB324 in the House will require the votes of roughly half a dozen Democratic members. Those listed here may or may not be the members of the majority caucus with the greatest reservations about the low

carbon fuel standard. Rather, these six represent districts in which Democrats enjoy the smallest advantage over Republicans, at least in terms of registered voters. As of January, this gap ranged from a mere 51 votes in District 20, represented by **Paul Evans**, to 2,273 in District 51, represented by **Shemia Fagan**. Their constituents - and Republicans - should watch carefully with an eye toward the next election.

A gap of more than 2,000 votes might seem large, but Fagan's district contains 34,429 registered voters, of whom only 12,427 are Democrats. There's plenty of opportunity, in other words, for constituents of a moderate and sensible disposition to either hold her accountable or reward her for her vote on SB324. The same goes for her colleagues, including those not named here.

We sent each of these representatives an email Wednesday morning asking how they intended to vote on SB324, and we followed up by speaking with staffers in each of their offices. By 3 p.m., our clearly communicated deadline, only one - **Betty Komp** - had responded. She is undecided.

The six Democrats with the narrowest advantages, in terms of voters registered in January, are: Evans, Monmouth; **Caddy McKeown**, Coos Bay; Komp, Woodburn; **Susan McLain**, Forest Grove; **Joe Gallegos**, Hillsboro; and Fagan, Clackamas.

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