

Submitter: Jane Hickman
On Behalf Of: Third Act Corvallis
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or SB1541
Topic:

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash and Members of the Committee,

We see the impacts of climate change all around us: droughts, raging wildfires, heat domes, floods, increasing asthma and other respiratory problems, and loss of wildlife habitat due to fire and drought. The costs to individuals and governments are unavoidable, with no plans currently in place to cover the costs of (1) providing heat pumps and air conditioning in all residential structures; (2) retrofitting high-risk highway corridors compromised by extreme weather and fire; (3) acquisition of forestland, farmland and floodplain properties to mitigate climate damages and replace habitat that will be lost to climate change; (4) building microgrid systems as backups for basic services, schools and emergency operations; and (5) providing cooling centers to shelter people during heat domes. [Report from Forum on Oregon Climate Change Economics, 3/25/25: "Oregon Remains Unprepared for the Costs of Climate Adaptation."]

Meanwhile, the companies whose products are causing climate damage annually rake in tens of billions of dollars in profits [fits.<https://www.statista.com/chart/27887/big-oil-sees-profits-increase/>]. Fossil fuel producers should not be permitted to continue externalizing the costs of their business onto individuals and state and local governments who face growing costs and shrinking budgets.

SB 1541 is a fair, sensible way to allocate costs where they belong and to ensure Oregon can adequately protect its citizens and its economy from the vagaries of climate change. The bill mandates a careful, scientific, transparent process for determining which companies have caused the most damage and to apportion at least some of those costs where they belong: onto the producers of carbon emissions. The legislation will provide critical funding necessary to fight fires and help those most directly impacted by climate damage. Only the largest emitters will be liable for paying into the Fund. Similar laws passed recently in New York State and Vermont and are modeled on the federal Superfund Act of 1980. Under that law, in effect for nearly 45 years, the EPA identifies parties responsible for hazardous substances released to the environment and either compels them to clean up the sites, or it may undertake the cleanup on its own using the Superfund, seeking to recover those costs from the responsible parties through settlements or other legal means. The idea of making polluters pay is not new, and it should not be controversial. I respectfully urge you to pass this important legislation.