

The Battle is Joined

Some entrepreneurs enter the business world with a model that demands they fully internalize the cost of doing business; some, though not all responsible business owners, establish Benefit Corporations that fully respect employees and the environment and seek a profit while doing so. Other entrepreneurs maximize profits while externalizing costs, exploiting employees and polluting their environment. An economic system that permits the latter behavior provides an unbalanced playing field where polluters outcompete those who behave responsibly.

Proponents of SB1541 think that polluters should pay for the damage they impose on the planet. As has repeatedly been stated: Moms often tell their children to 'clean up the mess.' Opponents of SB141 apparently think it's acceptable to generate profits by polluting and thus imposing the cost of doing business on others and the planet.

For some 15 years, as a result of my association with Southern Oregon Climate Action Now, I have been engaging with the state legislature to support legislators seeking to address the worsening climate crisis. I have watched and participated in Public Hearing of bills, I have attended and commented on Rulemaking Advisory Committee sessions, and I have advocated for bills remotely and in Salem. I have been consistently disappointed by the opponents of climate action because their arguments seem almost universally to be grounded in a lack of understanding of what proposals that they oppose seek to achieve or how they seek to do it. The opposition push-back against SB1541 is no different. It seemed that opponents came to the Public Hearing with prepared comments and paid no attention to the remarks of the introductory panel of speakers who would have corrected their misunderstandings, had they listened.

Instead of offering a perspective based on what the bill does, the usual suspects from Oregon Business and Industry, the Loggers' Association, The Oregon Farm Bureau, the Oregon Forest Industries Council, and the Western States Petroleum Association offered an array of inaccurate criticisms that included, but were not limited to, claiming that SB1541 would:

- place regulations on Oregon's farmers and small businesses, even though the bill contains absolutely no such regulations;
- require small businesses to pay into the fund, which would only be the case in the unlikely event that an Oregon small business was responsible for a billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions globally between 1995 and 2024;
- inappropriately or illegally charges entities for damages previously imposed when this is exactly what superfund accounts have been doing for decades to fund cleaning up polluted land or waters after corporate malfeasance has polluted them;
- place limits on carbon (meaning greenhouse gas) emissions when the bill does no such thing but merely seeks funds to promote remedy for the damage climate change has already imposed on Oregon and mitigate damage it will likely continue to impose;

- increase the cost of fuel when Dr. Joseph Stiglitz had just pointed out that fuel prices are determined by an array of factors that SB1541 does not address and that the reducing cost of renewable energy would preclude fossil fuel corporations from pricing themselves out of the competitive equation by raising their prices.

It was also somewhat amusing to hear from opponents of SB1541 that, rather than pass this bill, the legislature should resurrect the cap-and-trade concept. Again, unlike cap-and-trade proposals, SB1541 does not target greenhouse gas emissions reduction; it's a superfund proposal designed to fund cleaning up the mess created by decades of antisocial behavior by corporations externalizing the cost of their business model onto our environment and its occupants. Of course, these are the very same organizations that argued vehemently against, and basically killed, cap-trade-invest during years of campaigns of disinformation.

It is notable that the opponents never offered any alternative to the proposed remedy contained in SB1541. Presumably, they consider it acceptable for businesses to continue scoring huge profits while imposing on the planet global climate change and on Oregonians the cost of the destruction it causes.

When opponents of SB1541 are prepared to engage in discussion based on an accurate understanding of what the bill seeks to achieve, it might be possible to have a productive exchange. Until then, such an honest, open exchange seems unlikely.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan R.P. Journet". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing "A" and "J".

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