

Making sense of the cap and trade proposal

Legislators, locals exchange ideas during video chat

By KATHY ANEY
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The trio of state legislators on the video screen in the Blue Mountain Community College conference room left no doubt they are not in love with Oregon's cap and trade proposal.

Nine people sat around the BMCC conference room table sipping coffee and chatting with Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, and Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, early Wednesday morning at the college's bimonthly legislative video session. The lawmakers sat inside the Oregon Capitol in Salem. Normally, only Hansell and Barreto appear, but this day they brought Bentz along to explain the complicated cap and trade system in the works.

Bentz, who sits on the Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction, gave a 10-minute primer on the subject, calling it incredibly complex.

The program would push industry to find cleaner ways to do business by charging companies for their carbon emissions. He said the program could bring in an estimated \$550 million a year. California's 10-year-old program and others in Quebec and British Columbia pro-



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Jeff Blackwood, Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition board member and retired Umatilla National Forest supervisor, shares about local effects of climate change, such as longer fire seasons, increase of invasive species, drought-stressed trees and higher spring runoff, during a video session with three Eastern Oregon legislators at Blue Mountain Community College.

vided models for the Oregon legislation.

Proponents say such a program would help rein in carbon emissions, fund green technology and help protect the world for future generations. On the other hand, critics say cap and trade could drive business from the state and boost fuel prices without making reducing carbon emissions.

As a committee member, Bentz said he worked harder on developing this program than "anything I've done since law school." Yet, he said he doesn't personally support the idea of cap and

trade, preferring adaptation (predicting the effects of climate change and taking action to minimize damage). He worries about farmers and ranchers and said rural Oregon could bear too much of the burden with cap and trade. He knows from polls however that the majority of Oregonians favor the bill.

"We can spend a lot of time saying, 'Hell, no,' but this train has kind of left the station," he said.

He said he respects Democratic colleagues on the carbon committee, he just sees things from a different angle.

"I don't want to attribute bad motives to my Democratic friends who are working on this bill," Bentz said. "They are receiving incredible pressure from constituents to do something."

Barreto said cap and trade isn't the answer and will burden the business community.

"This is adding more straws on the camel's back," he said.

As special taxes, family leave requirements and the like stack up, he said, "it doesn't paint a rosy picture about what's coming down the pike."

Pendleton businessman Winston Hill, co-owner of Buckin' Bean Coffee Roasters, asked measured questions about data from California's experience with cap and trade. Hill soaked in the answers, and then told the lawmakers the bill could bring dire consequences for small businesses and family farms, like the one on which he grew up.

"Has anyone looked at the price of wheat lately?" he asked. "The breakeven point is right there. The margin is gone. Just where is all this money supposed to come from? Eventually these types of programs will drive people across state lines. Oregon is not a planet unto itself."

Hansell said he worries about Oregon's nursery industry, one of the state's top earning crops. The senator said he recently visited with industry representatives who commented on effects of Alberta's cap and trade program on the province's nursery business.

"They said Alberta pretty much lost their nursery industry because of the added expense they had with natural gas," Hansell said.

Jeff Blackwood watched one of the two screens from his place at the conference table. Blackwood, former supervisor of the Umatilla National Forest, sits on the board of the Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition, a non-partisan, non-politi-

cal group that looks at ways to mitigate climate change on a local level. Change is already happening, he said, ticking off a list of them: earlier runoff, longer fire seasons, increasing temperatures, drought-stressed trees and an increase of invasive species.

"We know the change is happening," Blackwood said. "We know it's going to take sacrifices from all sectors."

Chuck Wood, retired engineer and former Pendleton city councilman, said he recently found the bill online and has been digesting it slowly. He said he remains unsure whether cap and trade is the answer instead of a carbon tax, sequestration or another alternative.

"I'm really in favor of doing something about climate change," he said. "It's a big problem."

That was a sentiment no one in the room disputed.

"I understand there's a need to focus on the environment. We're all in the same ship, for crying out loud," Hill said. "When it sinks, we all sink."

The community video-conferences, sponsored by BMCC and the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce, are at 7 a.m. every first and third Wednesday of the Legislative Session in the college's Pioneer Hall Boardroom.

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