

What's next for climate change policy? That's a good question

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Body

July 01--Supporters of cap and trade inside and outside the statehouse will have to rethink and revise their next proposal for **climate change** policy in Oregon.

House Bill 2020 made it out of the House June 17 and was before the Senate, but the legislation stalled for a more a week after Republican senators walked out June 20.

The bill would have established Oregon as the second state in the country, after California, with an economy-wide cap and trade system, setting a cap for total greenhouse gas emissions across major industries in the state. Companies then would have allowances for pollution, which they could trade. The cap would drop over coming decades in an effort to curb global warming.

The Republican senators were set to return to the Senate on Saturday, after their leader declared HB 2020 dead on Friday. Earlier in the week the top Democrat, Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said his party didn't have the necessary votes to pass the controversial legislation.

Republican lawmakers in Oregon indicated they want to address **climate change**, just not through cap and trade, said Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield.

"That sort of poses the question, 'OK, if not this way, what way?' " he said.

The question will go unanswered for now. No one -- from **climate** activists to small farm advocate-- seems to know what is next for potential **climate change** policy in Oregon.

A revamped cap and trade bill could reemerge in next year's legislative session, but it is a short session lasting a little more than a month. The next long session, lasting about half a year, won't be until 2021.

Cap and trade backers could collect signatures and put the policy before voters through a ballot initiative. But earning a spot on a ballot can take months, if not a year.

So cap and trade won't be returning anytime soon.

And, a rift remains between Democrats and Republicans after the bitter debate over cap and trade. But, going forward, Beyer said the sides will have to work together to address **climate change**.

There's an underlying urgency to address **climate change** in Oregon, he said.

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"The urgency, if you listen to the scientists, is that the impacts on climate are fairly drastic," Beyer said. Global warming is causing more droughts, increasing the number of wildfires and affecting other climate patterns, he said.

Climate activists agree about the immediacy. They say that climate change is indeed happening, and Oregonians will have to determine how best to confront it.

"We are either going to learn easy or we are going to learn hard," said Linda Kelley, a member of 350 Eugene. The group is the local affiliate of 350.org, a national organization advocating for public policies addressing climate change.

She followed HB 2020 closely as the bill went through the Oregon Legislature. The Joint Committee On Carbon Reduction -- comprised of Democrats and Republicans from the House and the Senate -- introduced the legislation in February.

The bipartisan committee held hearings about the bill around the state, and lawmakers made many amendments, but the cap and trade proposal remained controversial.

Like Democrat lawmakers in Oregon, Kelley said she wasn't sure what changes could be made to a revised climate change policy to appease conservatives. "It's really hard to tell what would actually work to get Republicans more on board with this," she said.

Critics say cap and trade puts an unfair burden on rural Oregonians, particularly farmers and loggers. Their argument was based on the expectation that cap and trade would drive up the price of gas and diesel.

Senate Minority Leader Herman Baertschiger, R-Grants Pass, gave rural Oregonians credit when announcing the death of the cap and trade bill on Friday. "Wanted you to hear it straight, no sound bites, no partial truths," read a Friday post on Baertschiger's Facebook page. "HB2020 is dead! -- and it will remain so because of the tremendous showing from rural Oregon. You were loud and your voices were heard. We could not have done it without you."

Beyer pointed out that companion legislation, Senate Bill 1051, would have provided rebates to farmers and loggers to offset higher fuel costs. But the opposition to HB 2020 remained fierce even with the concession.

Rep. Cedric Hayden, R-Roseburg, wasn't on the committee that crafted HB 2020. But the bill did come through the Subcommittee on Natural Resources, of which he is a member.

Hayden is a second generation Oregon lawmaker and the rare Republican representing a portion of Lane County. He said HB 2020 was doomed because of the economic burden it would have put on rural Oregonians. "I think Republicans were looking for a more balanced approach," he said.

The death of HB 2020 could have dire repercussions when it comes to climate change, warns Tera Hurst, executive director of Renew Oregon, a Portland-based group that lobbied for the bill.

"Bold action is necessary for our state to combat and prepare for the climate crisis," she said in a statement. "... We either undertake a dramatic transition to clean energy or we suffer the almost unimaginable consequences of the climate crisis to our health, economy, and natural resources in Oregon. This crisis knows no boundaries, no Senate districts."

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