



Written by [James Murphy](#) on June 24, 2019

Oregon Republicans Go Into Hiding to Avoid Climate-change Vote

GOP legislators in Oregon have gone into hiding to avoid voting on an extreme climate-change bill that would drastically increase the price of fossil fuels in the state. The Republicans — 11 of them — are looking to deny Democrats a quorum, thus stalling a vote on the measure and buying time to further educate the public on the dangers of the bill.



Oregon's Democrat governor, Kate Brown, has ordered the state police to find the missing lawmakers, apprehend them, and bring them back to Salem so that a vote can be taken. In the meantime, the senators are each being fined \$500 per day that they refuse to show up to the capital.

After Brown ordered state police to round up the senators, Senator Brian Boquist, a Republican from Dallas, Oregon, upped the rhetoric by telling Oregon State Police Superintendent Travis Hampton to “send bachelors and come heavily armed. I’m not going to be a political prisoner in the state of Oregon. It’s just that simple.”

Feeling threatened by Boquist’s comments, Senate President Peter Courtney canceled plans for a Saturday session for fear of possible actions by right-wing militia groups.

So, it’s just a little bit tense in the Beaver State right now.

The legislation in question is [HB 2020](#), climate-change legislation that would create a cap and trade system where individuals would essentially be paying for the privilege of adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.

The impact of the legislation will be felt most acutely by rural residents of Oregon, since they must travel longer distances, tend to drive less fuel-efficient vehicles such as trucks and SUVs, and have far fewer public-transportation options than do bigger cities. The irony is that it is the cities that produce substantially higher levels of pollutants and greenhouse gases.

“The bill makes the urban-rural divide stronger than ever because the biggest polluters are in Oregon’s large cities,” said Senate Republican Leader Herman Baertschiger, Jr., who hails from Grants Pass. “It is fundamentally inequitable to put the responsibility of cleaning up their pollution on the backs of rural Oregonians.”

Ultimately, HB 2020 envisions an 80-percent reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions (from 1991 levels) by the year 2050. The aim is to accomplish this by making fossil fuels so expensive to use that industries, farms, and transportation providers will have no choice but to find alternative fuels, buy electric cars, or not drive. Gasoline and diesel fuels will be hardest hit, with prices per gallon to



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increase from 19 to 72 cents per gallon in the first year, gradually going up until 2050 when the carbon tax will jump to between \$1.51 to \$5.64 per gallon.

It's Al Gore's [carbon-credit scheme](#) all over again. And this time it's backed by government mandate.

The bill does contain "relief valves" for some individuals and businesses. Oregon residents who earn less than 250 percent of federal poverty guidelines — for individuals, less than \$31, 225 and for families, less than \$64,375 — may qualify for refunds based on the average amount of fuel used in their county. A companion bill would also give fuel rebates for vehicles used in the agricultural and forestry industries.

Oregon's two largest electric providers are essentially exempt from the new mandates in the short term. The new legislation gives them free exemptions until 2030, since they are already attempting to replace all coal-fired plants. But consumers will still be hit as the companies look for large-scale solutions to completely replace coal-fired plants. Right now, technologies to replace coal, such as solar and wind, [are very expensive](#), and would definitely add to the bills of customers as those switchovers take place.

It's an awful bill, and the Republicans are right to oppose it. Ultimately, it's going to hurt Oregon's citizens and put an undue burden on the state's rural residents. But is leaving the state to avoid the vote really the right move?

A quorum denial is political grandstanding at its worst. The move echoes back to 2011 when 14 Democrat senators in the State of Wisconsin fled to Illinois to avoid a vote on then-Governor Scott Walker's Budget Repair Bill. But those Democrats were simply postponing the inevitable as Walker's bill ultimately became law.

The Oregon Republicans' hearts might be in the right place, but they can't go on like this indefinitely. Besides, it was a garbage tactic when Democrats pulled it in Wisconsin, and simply switching the political parties doesn't make it a good tactic in Oregon.

Besides, the Republicans shouldn't be looking to Wisconsin for answers on dealing with this awful legislation; they should be looking to France.

When French President Emmanuel Macron raised fuel taxes in the country in late 2018, those tax increases similarly affected rural citizens far more adversely than city-dwellers. Out of this sprang the [Yellow Vest protests](#), which led to Macron backing down and rescinding the new fuel taxes.

The people of Oregon elected their current legislature, and that decision by the people has led to awful legislation such as HB 2020. It's only when those same people get fed up with their government's stupidity and raise their voices (and their votes) against it, will such things begin to change.

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