

Time to exercise our self-governing authority

Oregon State Representative Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario) has introduced House Bill 2480 to literally take power away from the people of Oregon.

Introduced on behalf of a corporate lobbying firm and despite President Trump's inaugural promise to give the power back to the people, HB 2480 would use state preemption to strip communities of their fundamental right to protect themselves from non-sustainable energy infrastructure. "A city, county or other local government may not enact any charter provision, ordinance, resolution or other provision related to regulating the expansion of infrastructure for the primary purpose of transporting or storing fossil fuels."

This is hardly the first time our legislators have worked to supplant local control on behalf of corporations. Senators Arnie Roblan and Jeff Kruse cosponsored the so-called Monsanto Protection Act that prohibits local communities from banning GMOs. The Farm and Forest Act, forces toxic pesticides on unwilling communities. State preemption prohibits local control over minimum wage, land annexation, housing, and gun control.

In a recent tweet about his contested travel ban, Trump indicated Americans should be guaranteed, "...the security and safety to which we are entitled." Nevertheless, Trump's recent executive order limiting already inadequate government protections prove, American citizens should not expect

“security” from another Wall Street induced global financial crisis and are not, apparently, entitled to clean air and water.

Coos and Columbia counties have introduced citizen initiatives to do what state and federal legislators will not do, secure our right to a sustainable energy future. Measure 6-162, The Coos County Right to a Sustainable Energy Future Ordinance on the May 2017 ballot in Coos County will prohibit hydraulic and pneumatic fracturing, coal transportation and the proposed Jordan Cove LNG export terminal and the associated Pacific Connector Gas Pipeline.

The bill will preempt Portland’s ban on large fossil-fuel storage facilities and seeks to stop democratically enacted ordinances like Measure 6-162.

The natural gas industry contributes to Bentz’ campaign and HB 2480 effectively allows the fossil-fuel industry to do what it wants and violates a community’s local self-governing authority to protect its citizens. In a so-called representative democracy, it’s clear that all too often our legislators represent corporate interests and not the people who elected them.

It’s precisely because we live within a system, defended by our own state government, that denies local democratic rights in favor of corporate privilege that communities are turning to direct democracy to change the rules. The Oregon Constitution clearly states “... that all men, when they form a social compact are equal in right... and they have at all times

a right to alter, reform, or abolish the government in such manner as they may think proper.—“

The hotly contested immigrant travel ban demonstrates that states don't like giving up governing authority to the federal government any more than counties and municipalities like being preempted by the state. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled against reinstating the ban proving that states can govern independently of the federal government. Local communities also have a fundamental right to self-government.

More communities are flexing their self-governing authority. The City of Lafayette, Colorado, is considering an anti-fracking ordinance which aims to preempt the state's authority in oil and gas development by legalizing non-violent direct action protests that would include sit-ins, strikes, workplace occupations or blockades.

To affirm communities' right to self-government to reject corporate fossil fuel projects or address housing access, the Oregon Community Rights Network introduced a statewide citizen initiative to amend the Oregon Constitution to recognize community responsibility and authority to protect the health, welfare and safety of citizens. The Right of Local Community Self-Government, allows communities to be the decision makers over that of corporate-backed state preemption like HB 2480.

The one-size-fits-all centralized government continues to fail the planet and the working class. In this grand, multi-generations long representative democracy experiment, the poor have gotten poorer and the rich richer. There has been a consistent, widening inequality since the 1970's such that today 20% now own 85% of the wealth. In the four decades

since we enacted NEPA and established the EPA our environment has continued to degrade and the doomsday clock has ticked forward to within 2.5 minutes to midnight.

Time to change the rules in our favor and decentralize the current power structure. As Pattie Gouveia, my co-sponsor on the YES on Measure 6-162 campaign in Coos County, stated, "The transportation, storage, and burning of fossil fuels is absolutely a local issue, whereby the local must be able to assert the greatest authority about what happens in the community. HB 2480 is just another example of the Oregon legislature advancing corporate interests by denying local democratic rights."

Vote Yes on Measure 6-162 this May and support our right to be the decision makers about our energy future.