April 17, 2020

Shaun Jillions  
Executive Director  
Oregon Manufacturers & Commerce  
3080 25th Street SE  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Mr. Jillions,

I am in receipt of your letter dated April 10, 2020 requesting that I direct state agencies to immediately stop work on implementing my executive order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This executive order was a last resort after years of attempts to find a legislative path forward. In fact, as you and the other signatories to your letter know, in both of the last legislative sessions we had majorities of both chambers and a broad coalition of businesses and community groups supportive of legislation, only to have the Legislature grind to a halt when virtually all Republicans fled the state to deny quorum.

I have been clear and consistent on this issue, so let me restate my position again for you and others: climate change is crucial and urgent. We have heard that message loud and clear, especially from Oregon’s youth. If we don’t take immediate action, it is the next generation that will pay the price. We are seeing evidence that already points to another challenging summer season of drought, forest fire, and smoke. While certain actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have been achieved over the past several years, progress on setting a clear, science-based cap on carbon emissions has been thwarted with every delay tactic imaginable.

I will not use the excuse of one global crisis – COVID-19 – to further delay or slow the response to another global crisis, climate change.

Executive Order 20-04 establishes science-based emissions reduction goals for Oregon for the years 2035 and 2050, and directs state agencies to exercise their statutory authority to facilitate achievement of those goals. Executive Order 20-04 also provides specific directives to state agencies; for example, it directs the Oregon Public Utility Commission to work with utilities to implement wildfire mitigation plans to protect public safety and directs the Oregon Department of Energy to update energy efficiency standards for appliances.
By May 15 of this year, agencies named in Executive Order 20-04 will report to me on proposed actions, including plans and timelines for program scoping, rulemaking, and stakeholder engagement. This is the first step in the process of implementing Executive Order 20-04, with different timelines anticipated for different agencies moving forward. For example, directives to the Environmental Quality Commission and Department of Environmental Quality to cap and reduce emissions from certain sources does not have to be operational until 2022. Formal rulemaking, in that case, is not likely to commence until later this year at the earliest and will comply with the requirements of Oregon’s Administrative Procedures Act (ORS 183).

Agencies will consider the challenges and uncertainties created by the pandemic and Oregon’s changed fiscal and economic climate as they develop implementation plans for their May 15 reports. My team and I will review those agency plans to ensure that timelines are flexible and appropriate, and that actions can be adequately resourced and aligned with my public health, climate, and economic priorities.

Vast numbers of business leaders across the country, from businesses small and large, agree with me that climate action and widespread economic growth are not mutually exclusive. Self-interested businesses and dark money groups have cynically and continuously spread misinformation on climate change. They have spent millions on lobbyists and political donations to stop advancements in climate policy. I suppose it should not be a surprise to me that industries dependent on polluting the climate are using the current COVID-19 crisis to further delay action and place the health and economic burdens of greenhouse gas pollution onto future generations. But it is a huge disappointment.

As Oregon and the nation confront unprecedented circumstances stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, my primary focus is protecting the health and wellbeing of all Oregonians. My second focus is getting our economy back up and running as quickly as possible. I appreciate the efforts of many Oregon businesses during this crisis to protect jobs, the health of employees, the provision of essential services, and the viability of enterprises.

As Governor, it is my responsibility to safeguard the health and wellbeing of Oregonians. While COVID-19 presents an immediate and unprecedented challenge for Oregon, the state must respond aggressively to the pandemic without ceasing work on the other critical priority of climate change. We face significant economic challenges in the weeks and months ahead. Collaboration with Oregon’s business community will be essential as we chart the course of economic recovery. I know you and the other signatories have the potential of being a productive, collaborative participant in this recovery effort.
You and others have worked relentlessly to stop attempts at setting a cap on carbon pollution and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a predictable, responsible way. Now, I ask you to please cease your cynical attempts to use the devastating COVID-19 crisis in supporting polluting industries on your path of obstruction.

Sincerely,

Governor Kate Brown