



OREGON SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER OREGON HOUSE REPUBLICAN LEADER PRESS RELEASE

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Democrats' Push to Move Transportation Tax Vote to Low-Turnout Primary Would Disenfranchise Voters

SALEM, Ore. – Senate Republican Leader Bruce Starr (R-Dundee) and House Republican Leader Lucetta Elmer (R-McMinnville) today criticized Democrat legislative leaders for announcing schemes to move the referendum on Governor Tina Kotek's transportation tax package to the May 2026 primary election, calling the move a blatant attempt to disenfranchise voters and shield elected Democrats from accountability.

After Governor Kotek insisted the Legislature should repeal the referred tax package outright, Democrat leaders now acknowledge that the Oregon Constitution prohibits repealing a measure once it has been referred to voters. Rather than allow the vote to proceed in November 2026 when participation is highest, their response is to fast track the election into a low-turnout primary, where far fewer Oregonians will have a voice and the risk of excluding unaffiliated, absentee, and military voters is significantly higher.

"This is politics, plain and simple, and the worst kind," said **Leader Starr**. "Democrats spent months trying to keep voters from having a say at all. Now they want to rush it into a low-turnout primary because they know this tax package is deeply unpopular with voters. In a November election, nearly seven out of ten Oregonians vote. In a primary, it is closer to one out of three. That choice is about protecting politicians who voted for a massive gas tax increase, not giving voters a fair say."

In Oregon's most recent comparable election cycle, voter turnout reached just [37 percent](#) overall and [15 percent](#) among unaffiliated voters in the May 2022 primary. That figure jumped to [66 percent](#) overall and [45 percent](#) among unaffiliated voters in the November 2022 general election.

"Oregonians rallied together to refer the proposed transportation tax to the ballot in record time. For the first time, Democrats realized the power of a disenfranchised population. If this policy is so good, it should stand on its own — on a full, general election ballot. Trying to tuck it away in an off-cycle election only confirms what the people already know: this gas tax is unpopular, and the public deserves a real say," said **Leader Elmer**.

Leader Starr emphasized that Republicans are engaging constructively in the 2026 short session to address transportation funding without raising taxes, regardless of the outcome of the referendum.

"Republicans have been clear from the beginning that we can balance ODOT's budget without raising taxes, and that is exactly what we are working to do," **Starr** said. "We are having real conversations about priorities and accountability, and that is how governing is supposed to work. Manipulating the election calendar to avoid political consequences is not how Oregonians expect their government to operate."

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