

Oregon News

POLITICS

As Oregon Defies Trump On DEI In Schools, Its Students Are Falling Through The Cracks

Daily Wire | By Mairead Elordi

When Oregon's Democrat governor announced her state would defy President Donald Trump's ban on diversity, equity, and inclusion, she said she was doing it for a good reason: the kids.

That's ironic. Because, under Kotek's leadership, Oregon's students are struggling to get by.

Nearly half of Oregon fourth graders scored below "basic" levels in reading, meaning they [lack](#) important reading comprehension skills like being able to determine the main idea of a text. In math, about a third of fourth graders scored below basic, [meaning](#) they likely struggle with simple concepts like odd numbers.

Lawmakers Press BOLI on Prevailing Wage Decisions

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

State Sen. Dick Anderson (R-Lincoln City) and Rep. Vikki Breese Iverson (R-Prineville) wrote to Oregon Labor Commissioner Christina Stephenson on April 8 following [an Oregon Journalism Project story](#) about the impact of Stephenson's prevailing wage determinations on the development of affordable housing. That story highlighted a project in Astoria called Copeland Commons. The nonprofit that owns it hopes to convert the century-old building that once served as cheap hotel into workforce housing. But Stephenson's agency, the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, determined developers must pay prevailing wage on the project, which could add substantially to the cost.

The story also noted that although affordable housing is supposed to be exempt from prevailing wage laws, BOLI has determined that if projects include commercial uses such as daycare or health clinics, those inclusions mean the entire project is subject to prevailing wage.

In [their letter](#), the lawmakers urged Stephenson to use her discretion to exempt more projects from paying prevailing wage, saying her agency's actions were "potentially reducing the number of units built, delaying project timelines, or shutting down construction entirely."

Governor Kotek speaks on leadership change at the Oregon State Hospital

KATU | By Vasili Varlamos

Governor Tina Kotek said the leadership overhaul at the Oregon State Hospital is a "fresh start" for the embattled state facility at a press conference Tuesday afternoon.

"It's about making sure we have the right practices and policies in place for patient safety, and I thought we needed a fresh start," said Gov. Kotek.

Uncertainty around gun laws drives Rogue Valley residents to stock up

OPB | By Justin Higginbottom

The potential for new Oregon firearm restrictions is driving residents to gun stores.

The Oregon Court of Appeals upheld Measure 114 under the state constitution last month. In 2022, voters approved the gun control law, which bans the sale of magazines able to hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition and requires a permit to purchase a gun.

Matt Sutterfield, manager of Black Flag Armory in Medford, said he's seen an increase in demand following the recent court ruling, as Rogue Valley residents look to pick up guns before any restrictions are in place.

He said high-capacity magazines are especially flying off the shelves. And customers aren't only inquiring about products, said Sutterfield, but about the law.

Jackson County Sheriff Nathan Sickler said when and if Measure 114 goes into effect, his office can have the required permitting process up and running fairly quickly. But he said it's hard to anticipate the extra workload of that system.

“We do anticipate that it could be significant, and it could really require reallocation of a lot of sheriff’s office resources to do this permitting process,” Sickler said. “Which means, in essence, a less safe community.”

[Oregon House passes bill to criminalize sharing AI-generated fake nude photos](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway

As artificial intelligence continues to evolve and make it easier to create realistic fake photos and video, Oregon lawmakers voted unanimously on Tuesday to add digitally created or altered images and recordings to the state’s “revenge porn” law.

The House’s 56-0 vote means Oregon is a step closer to becoming the 32nd state to ban the use of AI or other digital manipulation to create and spread nude or sexually explicit photos without consent. [House Bill 2299](#) now heads to the state Senate.

If approved by the Senate and signed by Gov. Tina Kotek, the bill would make it a crime to disseminate a digitally created or altered image with the intent to harass, humiliate or injure the person depicted. A first offense would be a Class A misdemeanor, with a possible penalty of up to 364 days in county jail and a fine up to \$6,250. Subsequent offenses would be a Class C felony, with a maximum potential prison sentence of 5 years and maximum fine of \$125,000.

[WA House OKs unemployment benefits for striking workers, but adds four-week limit](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Jerry Cornfield

Organized labor secured a major win Saturday as Democrats in the state House pushed through legislation to provide striking workers in Washington with unemployment benefits.

But union leaders were not all smiles afterward. The bill was amended on the floor to impose a four-week limit on receiving benefits, eight weeks less than the version approved in the Senate.

[Senate Bill 5041](#) passed the House on a 52-43 vote with seven Democrats joining Republicans in voting against the measure.

The Senate must now decide if it will agree with the revisions or insist on its position. When the bill came up for a vote last month, Senate Democrats narrowly defeated an amendment for a four-week limit before passing the bill 28-21.

New Jersey and New York are the only states with such provisions for striking workers. Oregon lawmakers [are debating legislation](#) this year that would offer unemployment benefits to striking workers there.

[Oregon House passes bill to ban smartphones in schools](#)

KATU | By Shelby Slaughter

The Oregon House has passed a bill that would ban smartphones in schools across the state.

The bill now heads to the State Senate. It directs school districts to adopt a policy prohibiting students from using their phones all day, with limited exceptions.

On April 11, an active shooter threat was made against Silverton High School. It prompted an evacuation and a large police presence to determine the origin of the phone call. Silverton Police officials later determined that the call was a hoax.

For these reasons, parents say students should have their phones with them to communicate with their families in an emergency.

Oregon is far from the first state to take up the idea of a statewide cellphone ban. At least eight states have enacted strict bans over the past two years.

[Oregon lawmakers move closer to prohibiting student cellphones in schools statewide](#)

OPB | By Natalie Pate

Oregon [House Bill 2251](#), which House representatives passed Tuesday on a 36-21 vote, requires school districts to ban student cellphone use during the school day.

The bill received bipartisan support on the House education committee, with Rep. Emily McIntire, R-Eagle Point, as the lone dissenting vote. But it only passed the House on Tuesday after a lively half-hour floor debate that showed a split among Republicans. The bill now heads to the Senate side.

The debate among state lawmakers echoes what's been heard in school districts nationwide: Phones in school are a problem. We need to do something about it. But what? And who gets to decide?

Drazan shared testimony that resonated with her to show why she felt it was time lawmakers stepped in. Still, there remained a split, largely among Republicans, on whether to support the bill.

Rep. Virgle Osborne, R-Roseburg, argued it was hypocritical to restrict students' cellphone use when lawmakers are allowing what he argues to be inappropriate materials to be circulated [in school libraries](#).

[Oregon bill would expand water use exemptions for small farmers](#)

OPB / By Nathan Wilk

More small farms in Oregon could operate without water rights under a bill moving forward in the state legislature.

Farmers currently need a water right to irrigate crops they plan to sell. However, [House Bill 3372](#) would exempt gardens that are a half acre or smaller.

Those farms could use up to 3,000 gallons of well water daily for irrigation—and 5,000 gallons in total each day, when including other industrial and commercial uses. Cannabis farms would not be offered the exemption.

The proposal comes as Oregon [has started more regularly enforcing](#) its current water use requirements.

Mike McCord, the state Water Resources Department's Northwest Region Manager, [told KLCC last year](#) that new funding in 2021 allowed the agency to hire more staff for that purpose.

Since then, many small gardens have received notices for the first time that selling their crops is illegal, according to Alice Morrison, the co-Executive Director of Friends of Family Farmers.

For small farmers scrambling to get into compliance, Morrison said obtaining a water right can be unaffordable, and could take years—if the request is approved at all.

The new exemptions in this bill would resemble existing ones for small livestock and non-commercial farms. Morrison argued this would create a stepping stone for new farmers—while also codifying limits on water use, in order to encourage conservation.

However, at least one prominent conservation group, WaterWatch of Oregon, [opposes the proposal](#). At a public hearing on April 7, its Senior Policy Analyst, Kimberley Priestley, voiced concerns.

Priestley told lawmakers the state should be limiting exempt uses, not expanding them. She said they circumvent the permitting process, which helps regulators understand whether there is groundwater available in an area, and if a new well would cause environmental degradation.

[Lawmakers Move to Limit Rent Increases in Marinas and Manufactured Home Parks](#)

Willamette Week / By Nigel Jaquiss

HB 3054 takes a concept Oregon lawmakers love and economists hate—rent control—and ratchets it downward in two specific sectors of the housing market: marinas and manufactured home parks.

Following on the heels of 2019 and 2023 bills that enacted and subsequently lowered the nation's first statewide rent controls, HB 3054 would limit annual rent increases at parks and marinas of more than 30 homes to 6%. It would limit rent increases in parks with 30 or fewer homes to 10%, or 7% plus inflation, whichever is lower.

For her part, Fahey acknowledges that Oregon is short 100,000 homes and that economic research strongly suggests capping rent discourages new investments in housing. "Mobile homes in parks are just an entirely different market," she says. "They are a captive market. The other key difference is, nobody is building new mobile home parks, so you're not discouraging investments."

Economists, including those at the consulting firm ECONorthwest, have regularly told policymakers that capping rents generally has "unintended harmful effects," as the firm wrote in a December 2023 study,

including “making housing less affordable, increasing displacement, and impacting low-income renters and minority communities.” ECONorthwest didn’t testify on HB 3054.

[Oregon House gives 'do-pass' recommendation to bill aiming to crack down on ticket scams](#)

KOIN | By Jashayla Pettigrew

An Oregon bill dubbed the “[Fan Fairness & Transparency Act](#)” is forging ahead.

The enactment of [House Bill 3167](#) would require ticket sellers to show the full cost of concerts and other events upfront. It would also ban them from intentionally using software that prevents fans from accessing tickets at an equitable price, among other “deceptive marketing” tactics.

[Portland School Board Members Are Still Debating the Bond's Contents](#)

Willamette Week | By Joanna Hou

The April 8 meeting of the Portland Public Schools Board featured an unusual sight: Three weeks before May ballots were to land in voters’ mailboxes, board members squabbled about what would be included in the district’s construction bond.

Portland Public Schools’ \$1.83 billion bond is intended to finance curriculum, technology, and deferred maintenance. But three high school modernization projects have dominated School Board members’ discussions since the fall. The district has budgeted \$1.15 billion—nearly two-thirds of its bond—to overhauls of Jefferson, Cleveland and Ida B. Wells high schools. If built to their current budgets, they will be some of the most expensive high schools in the nation.

[PGE's Plan to Cut Trees in Forest Park Goes to City Council Thursday](#)

Willamette Week | By Tyler Brown

A controversial proposal by Portland General Electric to cut down nearly 5 acres of trees in Forest Park will go before the Portland City Council at 2 pm Thursday, April 17, as residents and environmental advocates prepare to protest outside City Hall.

The project would remove approximately 376 trees—some decades or even centuries old, critics say—to make way for a transmission line PGE says is necessary to meet growing energy demands. The plan has drawn criticism from conservation groups and members of the public who say the environmental cost is too high.

[Gov Kotek to US Education Dept: 'Not changing how we work in Oregon'](#)

KOIN | By Ariel Jacobazzi

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek doubled down Tuesday on her directive to Oregon schools last week to ignore the Trump Administration’s demands to cut diversity-equity-inclusion programs or lose federal funding. At a media briefing at the State Capitol, Kotek honed in on the importance of keeping DEI practices in Oregon schools.

[U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley Addresses 2026 Plans](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

Speculation about whether Merkley will run again has heated up in recent days, and some hopefuls have begun eyeing congressional seats should one of Oregon’s five Democratic members of the U.S. House seek to succeed him.

Merkley’s campaign gave an equivocal response to that speculation. “Jeff is 100% focused on defeating Trump’s agenda,” said campaign spokeswoman Maggie Sunstrum. “As usual, Jeff and [his wife], Mary [Sorteberg], will make a formal campaign announcement regarding 2026 sometime this quarter.”

[Deschutes County sheriff gave false testimony in criminal cases, DA finds](#)

OPB | By Emily Cureton Cook

Before Kent van der Kamp became the sheriff of Deschutes County, he gave false testimony in more than one criminal case, and now many of his past cases are under review, according to Deschutes County District Attorney Steve Gunnels.

[Northwest Observer](#)

Northwest Observer | By Donna Bleiler

Oregon Senator Kim Thatcher (R-Keizer) introduced a reform in lawmaking before the Senate Committee on Rules. [Senate Bill 1006](#), a bipartisan effort led by Thatcher, upholds the separation of powers and reaffirms that only the Legislature has the authority to propose laws. The bill would prohibit state agencies, statewide elected officials, and other entities from directly introducing legislation, requiring all proposed laws to go through a legislator or legislative committee.

FEDERAL FUNDING

Oregon wildfire funding takes legislative back seat as lawmakers grapple with federal cuts

OPB | By April Ehrlich

[House Bill 3940](#) — a mashup of multiple funding proposals, including one that would add a surcharge to bottles purchased in the state — sits in a revenue committee. So does [Senate Bill 1177](#), which would pull some money from Oregonians' tax rebate known as "the kicker" and invest it into a trust. Then there's a [joint resolution](#) that would redirect some lottery revenues.

There's a chance these funding proposals will move forward through the remaining months of this long legislative session. But there's also a strong possibility that the session ends without new funding for wildfire prevention and firefighting costs — leaving Oregon's fire agencies once again vulnerable to falling into financial deficit, and unable to pay their bills.

It's a tough budget year in many ways, as Oregon policymakers aim to tackle multiple crises before them: aging roads and bridges, an ongoing housing crunch, a desperate need for more public defenders. State lawmakers are used to juggling multiple financial demands in a budget year. But this time, they also need to account for an unpredictable federal administration threatening to slash spending on public services across the board.

Federal funding freeze halts key infrastructure projects in tribal communities

OPB | By Nate Perez

More than 22 tribes and nonprofits across the country from Alaska to the Midwest, have had around \$350 million in federal funding for key infrastructure projects frozen, often without notice. NPR spoke with 11 of them who say some have found out their funds were suspended when they logged onto the federal payment system in early March. Others have had their grants disappear from that system entirely. Tyonek and other villages in Alaska received no notice whatsoever.

HOUSING

Multnomah County housing authority opens its waitlist for low-income rental assistance

OPB | By Alex Zielinski

After two years of being closed, the waitlist to apply for Multnomah County's low-income rental assistance program has reopened for a single week.

The federally-funded Housing Choice Voucher program, formerly known as Section 8, helps qualified low-income tenants pay rent in market-rate apartments.

Local public housing authority Home Forward manages a waitlist for these vouchers and applications for the 13 low-income apartment complexes overseen by Home Forward. These lists are rarely added to, due to the immense local demand for affordable housing and limited federal dollars. The last time Home Forward allowed new renters to apply [was in 2023](#). Before that, it had been closed for seven years.

The demand is high. In the five hours since opening the waitlist on Tuesday, Home Forward has received nearly 7,000 applications. During 2023's waitlist opening, Home Forward had received at least 1,000 fewer applications in the initial hours of opening the waitlist.

New Tensions Lie Beneath the City's Tiny Pod Shelters

Willamette Week | By Sophie Peel

Last week, the city of Portland told a longtime shelter operator it had not been awarded a contract to continue managing one of the city's tiny pod villages in Southwest Portland.

Leaders of that nonprofit, Sunstone Way, say they were surprised. Since 2022, they'd run the tiny pod village in Multnomah Village—as well as two other villages—without ever having to reapply. And the contract had been with Multnomah County, not the city.

[How much does Multnomah County pay for its homeless shelters? It varies by type.](#)

Oregon Live / By Austin de Dios

Multnomah County [spends](#) tens of thousands of dollars annually on each shelter bed that it operates, with beds in motels or alternative shelters like tiny home villages costing significantly more than those in congregate shelters.

That's according to data that county officials presented to the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday at the request of Commissioner [Shannon Singleton](#). Singleton, who served an eight-month stint as the county's interim homeless services director in 2022, requested that officials provide a breakdown of costs by shelter type and outcomes for individuals who go through the shelter system.