

Oregon News

POLITICS

Oregon Senate Advances Bill to Increase Difficulty of Banning Books in Schools

Willamette Week | By Joanna Hou

All senators voted along party lines, except state **Sen. Dick Anderson (R-Lincoln City)**, who sided with Democrats. Two members (a Republican and Democrat) were excused.

Senate Republicans mostly opposed the bill, which they said took away agency from individual communities to make decisions for their students. In a proposed amendment to the bill (that failed 11-17), they argued that it was up to local school districts to control their materials and that there were inappropriate books that shouldn't be shown to kids.

"We need parents to encourage their children to read from school libraries without having to worry about them finding inappropriate books on their shelves," **Sen. Noah Robinson (R-Cave Junction)** said in a release.

Republicans also said there were bigger problems for Oregon to face on the reading front. **Sen. Suzanne Weber (R-Tillamook)** said the state should focus on improving "abysmal" reading and math scores.

"Right now, three out of four eighth graders in Oregon can't read at grade level," Weber said in a release.

"That's a crisis. Instead of tackling real problems, Democrats passed a bill that expands government control and keeps inappropriate books on school shelves. Our kids deserve better."

Controversial proposal to take away Oregon vote by mail results in heated debate

Oregon Live | By Carlos Fuentes

A controversial bill that could repeal Oregon's [vote by mail](#) system resulted in a heated public hearing Monday afternoon, as dozens of individuals argued for and against scrapping the state's first-in-nation voting system.

Senate Bill 210, sponsored by **Republican Sens. David Brock Smith and Kim Thatcher**, would ask voters to decide in November 2026 whether to retain Oregon's [vote by mail system](#), which has been in place for more than two decades.

The bill is highly unlikely to advance. While several Republican lawmakers said low public trust in voting systems makes the proposal timely, several Democrats defended Oregon's voting system and said they would not support the bill.

"Democrats in the Legislature don't have any interest in rolling back vote by mail," House Speaker Julie Fahey, a Eugene Democrat, told reporters Monday. "It is a very popular program. Oregonians of all political affiliations love vote by mail."

Thousands of Oregonians slam Republican senator's attempt to end mail ballots

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway

Thousands of Oregonians submitted letters opposing a Republican senator's long-shot attempt to ask voters whether to repeal the state's decades-old mail voting law, swamping the Legislature's website on Monday.

The outcry against **Sen. David Brock Smith's** [Senate Bill 210](#) could serve as a preview of what's to come if his proposal or a separate initiative led by one of Brock Smith's Republican rivals makes it to the 2026 ballot. Oregonians have voted entirely by mail since 2000, after nearly 70% of voters approved switching to mail ballots in 1998.

"I think it's time, which is why this is a referral for Oregonians to either reaffirm or deny vote by mail in this state," the Port Orford Republican said during a Monday hearing of the Senate Rules Committee. Brock Smith's proposal would allow people to vote by mail if they're unable to vote in person on Election Day — if they ask for the ballot at least 21 days before an election and submit a valid Oregon driver's license, driver permit, state identification card, U.S. passport or military identification card.

Bill to mostly repeal mail-in voting in Oregon gets public hearing

KATU | By Jeff Kirsch, Vasili Varlamov

The bill was introduced in January by **Port Orford Republican Sen. David Brock Smith** but generated new interest after President Donald Trump signed an executive order earlier this year. Smith said reverting to in-person voting would cut down on potential voter fraud.

"Our voter rolls are fraught with needing to be cleaned up. Individuals that have moved away and out of Oregon that are registered in other states have received a ballot," said Smith. "It is more difficult to retrieve your social media account than it is to register to vote in Oregon."

In a public hearing on the bill on Monday, Democratic Sen. James Manning Jr. said he would not support this bill. Manning Jr. ran for Oregon secretary of state last election. The senator said the people he spoke to during his campaign said they enjoyed the accessibility of mail-in voting and that this issue is being blown out of proportion.

Smith's bill would refer the bill to voters for the next general election. **Senate Minority Leader Daniel Bonham** said it's time to ask the people of Oregon to affirm mail-in voting.

"This is us, the Legislature, saying we've made all these changes, and do you, the people, still believe in the system that we've created?" said Bonham.

[Bill to end vote-by-mail slows Oregon legislative website to a crawl](#)

OPB | By Dirk Vanderhardt

That activity appeared to be the cause of a pronounced slow down of the website. SB 210's sponsor, state **Sen. David Brock-Smith, R-Port Orford**, dubbed it "the bill that broke OLIS" in testimony before the Senate Rules Committee.

"The opportunity within this piece of legislation is to let the voters of this state reaffirm whether or not vote-by-mail is their choice," Brock-Smith said.

A Medford resident named Wanda Cockey [wrote to lawmakers](#) that she routinely receives ballots for people who used to live at her address.

Oregon's election infrastructure has come under fire in the last six months, following revelations the state's Driver and Motor Vehicle Services office mistakenly registered more than 1,600 people to vote who had not offered proof of citizenship. A tiny fraction of those people ultimately voted, and the Oregon Department of Justice is [investigating at least three people](#) criminally.

[Should Oregon end its vote-by-mail system? Legislators seek public opinion](#)

KOIN | By Lisa Balick, Aimee Plante

But **Republican State Sen. David Brock Smith of Port Orford** introduced a bill that, if passed, would [put an end to a vote-by-mail system](#) that has been in place in Oregon for decades.

"We think it's time, which is why this is a referral for Oregonians to either reaffirm or deny vote by mail in this state," Smith said.

[Squatter's rights in Oregon: Evictions can be costly, time-consuming](#)

Statesman Journal | By Capi Lynn

But in April 2024, their son allowed a homeless woman to stay in the backyard shed. What they assumed would be a temporary situation turned into a nine-month ordeal that cost them thousands of dollars.

After several attempts to get the woman to leave — including verbal requests, written notices, and calling the police — she moved into the master bedroom of the house. The Chamberlains turned to the court system for help but discovered the law was not on their side.

Squatting incidents like theirs, and worse, are happening nationwide. Laws in Oregon and many states tend to favor squatters by putting property owners and landlords through lengthy and costly legal battles to remove them.

Law enforcement brought the squatting problem to the attention of Oregon Rep. Annessa Hartman, D-Gladstone. One of her constituents had purchased a property through an auction only to find that individuals who knew the previous owner were squatting in the house and refused to leave.

[House Bill 3522](#), awaiting a vote Tuesday in the House, would allow a property owner to evict a squatter by providing a 24-hour written notice to vacate and filing a [FED eviction complaint in county court](#).

“We cannot allow gaps in our laws to create situations where unauthorized occupants have more rights than lawful tenants or homeowners,” said Hartman, a chief sponsor of the bill along with Rep. Boomer Wright, R-Coos Bay.

[Industry advocates at odds over reason for major dip in Portland apartment construction](#)

KATU | By Wright Gazaway

A [recent report from ECONorthwest](#) laid it bare: the number of housing units under construction in the final quarter of 2024 in Portland was the fewest since 2011.

The report said 1,607 units were under construction at the end of 2024, compared to more than 7,700 in the second quarter of 2018 when housing production peaked in Portland.

“We’re kind of seeing the reaction to the policies that have been put in place,” said Andie Smith.

She pointed to a requirement in Portland for new apartment projects to have a certain number of affordable units and a statewide cap on rent increases. Lawmakers voted in 2023 to cap rent increases at 10 percent or 7 percent plus the [Consumer Price Index \(CPI\) for All Urban Consumers](#) from September—whichever is lower.

Smith said another law under debate right now; banning AI software in rent-setting, would be another blow to development. She said each policy creates an unpredictable and inconsistent market for investors and developers.

[Criticism of proposed Portland rent-setting software ban buried, sparking complaints](#)

Oregon Live | By Shane Dixon Kavanaugh

Portland economic development officials’ critical take on a [proposed rent-algorithm ban](#) was omitted from a pair of City Council committee meetings that ultimately advanced the measure.

The City Council this week will consider barring the use of algorithms to set rents, an increasingly common practice among residential landlords who subscribe to real estate data services but which critics, including Councilor [Angelita Morillo](#), contend amounts to collusion among competitors.

[Portland voters want money spent on homelessness to deliver better results. There’s a surprising reason why it’s not](#)

Oregon Live | By Lillian Mongeau Hughes

More than two thirds of Portland-area residents who responded to a March poll commissioned by The Oregonian/OregonLive said they were not getting a good value from [tax dollars spent on homelessness](#).

In Multnomah County, that figure was significantly higher, with 76% of respondents saying they were getting a poor return on their investment compared to 61% in the other two counties. Respondents listed high rates of homelessness, minimal results and high taxes as reasons they felt tax money aimed at reducing homelessness was not being spent effectively.

[Oregon Ethics Commission to Determine if Board Examining OHSU-Legacy Deal Has Conflicts of Interest](#)

Willamette Week | By Anthony Effinger

The state regulator examining Oregon Health & Science University’s acquisition of Legacy Health is looking into allegations that two members of an all-volunteer board set up to advise state staff on the deal have conflicts of interest because of ties to the hospital systems.

[Controversial logging bill makes it through Oregon committee](#)

OPB | By April Ehrlich

Lawmakers have moved forward a controversial logging bill that could open the state up to lawsuits if Oregon doesn’t log enough timber in a given year.

Representatives in the House Committee on Natural Resources unanimously advanced [House Bill 3103](#) early Monday.

The bill would allow counties and the timber industry to sue the state forester if Oregon logs less than the Department of Forestry forecasts in its once-a-decade estimates.

The bill's five sponsors — all Republicans — added an amendment ahead of Monday's work session. The addition preserves the state's ability to implement other environmental regulations, like the Habitat Conservation Plan. That placated the environmental nonprofit Wild Salmon Center, which moved its stance to neutral with this amendment. That was enough to pull some Democrats in the committee to vote for the bill.

[Senate committee advances bill to fund Major League Baseball stadium in Portland](#)

KATU

An effort to secure funding for a new baseball stadium in Portland moved forward on Monday.

A Senate committee moved a bill forward with a do-pass recommendation.

The legislation [approves \\$800 million in bonds](#) to fund the stadium's construction.

The bonds would be repaid through a tax on players.

[Portland Diamond Project seeks \\$800M in bonds for baseball stadium](#)

KATU

The legislation builds on a 2003 bill, [Senate Bill 5](#), which approved \$150 million in bonds if Portland landed a team.

On Thursday, Oregon Sen. Mark Meek sponsored an amendment to the current bill, [Senate Bill 110](#), that would [increase](#) the approved bonds by \$650 million.

The state is not legally obligated to fund the stadium beyond what is appropriated. The bonds would be paid back by the "jock tax." The tax pulls funds from the income tax of both home and away players and team employees instead of using existing tax revenue or increasing taxes. The bill states that the bonds should be paid back in 30 years. After that, the tax revenue would be paid into the state's general fund. "We're not planning on taking anything to a referendum. We don't have any planned increases on Oregonians now. We just wanna execute what seems to be the most reasonable and simple way to get to where we need to get to put us in the most favorable position," said Portland Diamond Project founder and president Craig Cheek.

[Reading advocates want state literacy funds directed to teacher training, 'most neglected' schools](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt

More than 250 Oregon schools since 2023 have gotten some portion of the state's Early Literacy Success Initiative grants, a pot of \$90 million meant to pay for new elementary reading curriculum, reading tutors and after-school reading programs, and to train teachers in reading instruction backed by scientific study and review.

On Wednesday, Kotek's proposal to tweak her bedrock literacy initiative — [House Bill 3040](#) — will get a vote in the House Education Committee. It updates the 2023 Early Literacy Success Initiative legislation so that schools could spend their literacy grants on training classroom assistants, not just teachers and administrators.

It would also require grant money spent on new reading curriculum for grades K-5 to be used on instructional materials [approved](#) by the State Board of Education and would create a regional network of literacy experts housed in the Oregon Department of Education to support school and district literacy specialists and help with coaching.

[PacifiCorp involved in bills in Oregon, western states, limiting utility wildfire liability, damages](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt

The Oregon Legislature is expected to advance two bills this week that could provide electric utilities with a financial safety net and some level of protection from bankruptcy-inducing lawsuits if their equipment starts a catastrophic fire.

The bills bear striking resemblance to others being considered and passed by legislators in three other states, as well as controversial laws passed in Utah in 2020. PacifiCorp, owner of Pacific Power in Oregon, contributed to all of the bills and the Utah law.

Each of those bills confers upon utilities some version of state-sanctioned approval for “acting reasonably” to prevent wildfires, if they get wildfire mitigation plans approved annually or every few years by the state. Cooperative and private investor-owned utilities such as PacifiCorp say they need this to ensure that they are making smart investments in wildfire prevention and grid reliability, and to ensure they don’t go bankrupt.

That’s the argument being used by Oregon’s bill sponsors, too. But trial lawyers across the West, who represent victims of utility-caused wildfires, say the bills are meant to shift the costs of utility-caused wildfire damages from companies to customers.

Oregon’s [House Bill 3666](#) would grant utilities a state “wildfire safety certificate” for having annual wildfire mitigation plans approved by the Oregon Public Utility Commission, while [House Bill 3917](#) would set up a catastrophic wildfire fund that utilities pay into.

[He’s mayor of Oregon’s largest city. Most local residents aren’t sure how well he’s doing](#)

Oregon Live | By Shane Dixon Kavauagh

Portland Mayor Keith Wilson has yet to make an impression on a large number of metro area voters, including those who live in the city, a recent poll commissioned by The Oregonian/OregonLive found. Fifty-eight percent of voters across Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties said they are unsure how to rate Wilson, a businessman and political outsider who took office in January, according to the survey. Among Portland voters, that figure is 42%.

[Number of People Ending Their Lives Under Death With Dignity Act Declines](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

The number of people who ended their lives last year using Oregon’s first in the nation Death With Dignity Act declined slightly in 2024, according to a [new report from the Oregon Health Authority](#). An OHA official attributed the drop-off from 386 to 376 deaths to a 2023 statutory change which allowed people from other states to seek end-of-life prescriptions for the first time.

Voters originally [passed the Death With Dignity Act in 1994](#). It survived a 1997 ballot measure aimed at reversing it and legal challenges before going into effect.

[Senate Bill 1003](#), which would allow physicians’ assistants and nurse practitioners to prescribe end of life medications (only physicians may do so now) and would reduce the waiting period between when a patient requests a fatal prescription and when it can be written from 15 days to 48 hours.

[Lawyers say Oregon genital cutting law discriminates against boys; seek circumcision ban](#)

Oregon Live | By Zane Sparling

Oregon laws that forbid genital cutting of girls but stay silent on male circumcision must be expanded to equally protect all children, a new lawsuit asserts.

The plaintiffs ask the court to declare current Oregon laws banning only female genital cutting a violation of the state constitution’s Equal Rights Amendment and Equal Protection Clause. They say the court must either ban it for children of any gender or overturn the statute entirely. (Female genital cutting would remain illegal in Oregon under federal law).