

## **Oregon News**

### **POLITICS**

#### **[Oregon Democrats unveil ambitious road funding proposal. Now the haggling begins](#)**

*OPB | By Dirk Vanderhart*

Oregon would raise its gas tax by 20 cents, create a new 1% tax on cars sales and require electric vehicles to pay an entirely new “use charge” under a proposal top Democrats say is necessary to maintain the state’s beleaguered roads and bridges.

In all, an ambitious funding framework unveiled on Thursday would raise more than \$1.9 billion in new taxes and fees every two years once fully implemented. How much more was unclear, as a major charge within the package remained undefined.

GOP lawmakers were getting their first look at the detailed proposal Thursday, and offered a range of reactions. **Sen. Bruce Starr, a Dundee Republican** and the Senate’s top Republican on transportation issues, stressed that the framework was only the start of a negotiation.

“We’ve been waiting for the majority party to put their first offer on the table,” Starr told OPB. “Now is when the conversation starts.”

Polling shows that everyday costs rate among Oregonians’ top concerns, a point Republicans suggested would be a key emphasis as they attempt to rein in the taxing proposal.

As a nod to concerns about loose protocols in the agency, Democrats [have tapped Starr](#) to lead the way on recommending ways to increase accountability at ODOT. The state is currently contracting with a pair of consultants, who have until May 31 to finalize a review of agency management.

#### **[Proposal to raise money for transportation includes taxes on gas, tires, and new cars](#)**

*KATU | By Tanvi Varma*

A new proposal to raise \$2 billion for road maintenance and operations is now on the table. If passed, almost half of the money would go to counties and cities for transportation; a little more than half would go to the Oregon Department of Transportation. The money would be raised through an array of taxes related to transportation, including an increased tax on fuel.

The thought of having to pay more at the pump is not exactly good news for a lot of folks.

Also, a 1% tax on new cars, and a 3% tire tax.

#### **[Oregon Democrats unveil \\$1.9 billion transportation funding plan](#)**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway*

McLain and Gorsek’s plan, shared early with the Capital Chronicle under the condition that the publication not seek comments from anyone else before 3 p.m. Thursday, aims to raise at least \$1.9 billion in additional revenue per two-year budget cycle for the State Highway Fund, Oregon’s main source of transportation funding, by the time a 20-cent gas tax increase is fully phased in, in 2032. Much of that increased funding would come through increases to the gas tax, vehicle title and registration fees and the weight-mile tax paid by truckers. Oregonians would also see more money deducted from their paychecks under an existing payroll tax to pay for transit, and all electric vehicles would gradually be enrolled in a now-voluntary road usage charge program meant to replicate what their drivers would pay for gas-powered cars.

The plan, which will be refined by the Legislature before it adjourns in June, includes raising Oregon’s current 40-cent gas tax to 60 cents per gallon by Jan. 1, 2032. The biggest jump, to 48 cents, would happen Jan. 1, 2026, with 4-cent increases every two years until 2032.

It would also add \$66 to vehicle registration fees, which now run between \$126 and \$156 every two years. Titles, which cost about \$101 to \$116, would increase by \$90.

Electric vehicle drivers now pay more — \$192 for title and \$316 for registration — but their registration costs would go down as they enrolled in a road user charge program or paid a flat annual fee. The current road user charge program, OReGO, is a voluntary two-cent-per-mile fee, but lawmakers want to [expand it to all electric vehicles](#).

Senate Republicans, meanwhile, said the proposal is a start but requires significant revisions. **Sen. Bruce Starr, R-Dundee** and a committee vice chair, said Republicans are committed to finding common ground. "The majority has made it clear that we will have a seat at the table, and we anticipate the final product will look a lot different than what was released today," Starr said.

#### [Oregon transportation funding bill includes tax and fee hikes, new tax](#)

*Statesman Journal* | By Dianne Lugo, Anastasia Mason

The Oregon Department of Transportation said in 2024 that the agency faced an estimated \$1.8 billion annual funding gap and a projected \$300 million to \$400 million shortfall through the budget year that ends June 30. Without additional funding, ODOT said it would need to eliminate about 1,000 jobs, nearly 20% of its maintenance stations and reduce services.

Republicans have repeatedly said they won't commit to new taxes, but the co-chairs of the joint transportation committee said they were optimistic they can get bipartisan support.

"I believe that the co-chairs are working together and ultimately will work in a collaborative fashion with their Republican colleagues across the aisle," Starr, a co-vice chair of the committee said.

The Oregon Trucking Association and three trucking companies [sued](#) ODOT, its director, Kris Strickler, and the state, alleging heavy vehicles were being overcharged. They asked in January 2024 for at least \$925,200 returned and the disproportional charging halted. A hearing is scheduled for June 9.

The proposed funding package would implement an aggregate 16.9% increase and simplify the rates used to calculate what trucks pay.

The vehicle privilege tax implemented in 2018 requires Oregon vehicle dealers pay a 0.5% tax on new vehicle sales. Lawmakers estimate that increasing the rate to 0.8% would bring in an additional \$44.5 million every two years.

Oregonians would see an increase of about \$144 on a \$48,039 vehicle, the average sales price of a new car in February 2025, according to [Kelley Blue Book](#).

#### [Bill to protect Oregon most-contaminated groundwater areas is dead](#)

*Statesman Journal* | By Tracy Loew

A bill that would prevent new or expanded large livestock farms in Oregon's three groundwater management areas will not move forward during the 2025 legislative session.

An overflow crowd testified for and against [the bill](#) for 90 minutes at a hearing Thursday before Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, chair of the Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire, announced the bill would not get a vote.

Earlier this year, Gov. Tina Kotek issued an [executive order](#) allowing the Port of Morrow to violate its water pollution permit by spreading nitrogen-contaminated wastewater on nearby agricultural fields, despite the drinking water crisis. The port processes wastewater for nearby farms and factories.

#### [Marion County opposes bill giving local control over solid waste](#)

*Statesman Journal* | By Tracy Loew

When the Reworld garbage incinerator in Brooks [shut down Dec. 31](#), Marion County didn't just need to find a different place to send residents' garbage.

But a bill in the Legislature would free Salem and other Marion County cities from a state law — passed before the burner opened 38 years ago — that puts the county in charge of where haulers can take waste.

#### [After false starts, Oregon wolf compensation reform gains traction](#)

*Capital Press* | Mateusz Perkowsk

After a couple of false starts, legislation intended to reform Oregon's compensation policy for wolf killings of livestock appears to have gained momentum. Supporters say the overhaul will help restore trust in the state's livestock compensation program and discourage the illegal poaching of wolves. "We have ranchers all over this state who've lost faith in this program, that have lost faith in the voting that

takes place in this Capitol. This is a way for us, you, to reach back to those individual ranchers, to that community, with a positive vote,” said **Sen. Todd Nash, R-Enterprise**, who raises cattle.

#### **[Controversial farmland dump pit at risk of failing, state says](#)**

*Statesman Journal | By Tracy Loew*

A controversial dump site on Marion County farmland is nearly full of liquid and is at risk of failing, which would send an uncontrolled discharge of soil and sediment into nearby Ryan Creek, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality says.

DEQ, the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Marion County all have taken action this month to try to force its owners to either properly rebuild the pit or properly remove it. But the efforts may be too late.

#### **[Oregon bill would provide rebates for battery-operated leaf blowers](#)**

*Statesman Journal | By Tracy Loew*

Noisy gas-powered leaf blowers could begin to be replaced with cleaner, quieter battery-operated ones under a bill under consideration in the Oregon Legislature.

**[House Bill 2067](#)** would allocate \$2 million to a fund that would provide rebates, of up to 50% of the purchase price, to professional landscapers and contractors who buy the battery-operated blowers.

#### **[Oregon has spent \\$46 million fighting black market cannabis. Officials can't tell if it's working](#)**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Kaylee Tornay*

Workers on unlicensed grows just miles north of California were sleeping in shipping containers and **[being held on site](#)** by armed guards. In clandestine hash oil laboratories in central Oregon and Portland, jerry-rigged electrical wiring and pressurized butane gas had **[sparked explosions](#)**, blasting buildings apart and sometimes scorching people to death. Along the coast, local sheriff's deputies were intercepting hundreds of pounds of processed marijuana bound for Texas and Florida, bypassing state inspectors and tax collectors on the way out.

Legislators responded to the crescendoing concern by creating a new grant program seven years ago to support law enforcement efforts to bust these types of operations. The Illegal Marijuana Market Enforcement Grant was placed under management of the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission with an initial \$3 million in cannabis taxes funding it. Over time, that funding swelled, expanding to a growing group of counties and nonprofits.

In total, Oregon has spent \$46 million in the last seven years. Millions of cannabis plants have been seized, and hundreds of workers have been helped out of danger.

But has the money put a dent in the black market? Officials can't say.

#### **[Former students say a St. Helens High teacher abused them in the 1980s. He became a face of child welfare in Oregon](#)**

*OPB | By Joni Auden Land*

For nearly two decades, Gene Evans was the public face of state agencies responsible for protecting Oregon's children and holding accountable people who abuse them.

But a woman who was a student of his at St. Helens High School in the late 1980s says Evans groomed and sexually assaulted her when he was a teacher. Another student says he groomed and then forced her to grope him. In interviews with OPB, two other former students say he inappropriately touched them during classes.

Evans was never charged with any crime. When OPB visited his Lake Oswego home on March 12, he declined to comment and closed the door. OPB was later unable to reach Evans by phone and sent a certified letter that arrived at his home on March 14. OPB did not receive any response prior to publication.

#### **[Oregon DHS opens sexual abuse investigation into former spokesman Gene Evans](#)**

*OPB | By Joni Auden Land*

The Oregon Department of Human Services has opened an investigation into its former spokesman, [after OPB reporting revealed allegations that he sexually abused students](#) as a teacher in the 1980s.

Department officials confirmed Wednesday that the agency is investigating Gene Evans — who served as a director of communications for DHS from 2011-2017 — in relation to the allegations of sexual abuse that happened while he was a teacher at St. Helens High School. Those allegations included engaging in sexual activity with students, which Evans allegedly initiated with a 17-year-old when he was 31 years old.

#### [Oregon Supreme Court says 'misleading marketing' case against Tillamook can move forward](#)

*OPB | By Alejandro Figueroa*

It's been well over a year since the Oregon Supreme Court heard oral arguments about whether a lawsuit against the Tillamook County Creamery Association should be allowed to proceed. On Thursday, the court agreed that a group of Oregon residents suing the creamery does have a claim, allowing the case to move forward.

#### [Oregon House passes bill allowing landlords to evict squatters](#)

*KATU | By Vasili Varlamos*

The Oregon House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill Thursday that would allow property owners and landlords to evict a squatter after giving a 24-hour notice.

A squatter is an individual who occupies a property without a valid rental agreement or tenant authorization. The bill amends current law to incorporate this new eviction process. The bill allows a landlord or property owner to issue a 24-hour written notice to vacate the property to evict a squatter. The notice must state the date and time the squatter must leave and clearly indicate that the reason for eviction is the person's squatter status.

The bill explicitly adds squatters to the list of situations considered "unlawful holding by force" under eviction law. This would give property owners and landlords a clearer and faster legal mechanism to reclaim their property from unauthorized occupants.

#### [Uncertainty looms as Oregon auto dealers brace for impact from tariffs](#)

*KOIN | By Joey Vacca*

As dealers are expecting prices to creep up, Rempensperger noted it creates a challenge for the dealers because it's their job to find people an affordable car.

"We are anticipating — especially on the higher end vehicles — that this could be anywhere from a minimum of \$2,000 up to over \$10,000 price increase," Rempensperger added. "So again, the great unknown that we don't know right now is how it's going to impact each manufacturer."

#### [States ordered by U.S. Education Department to certify school DEI ban or lose funds](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Shauneen Miranda*

The U.S. Department of Education demanded in a letter to state education leaders on Thursday that they certify all K-12 schools in their states are complying with an [earlier Dear Colleague letter](#) banning diversity, equity and inclusion practices if they want to keep receiving federal financial assistance.

The department's sweeping order gives K-12 state education agencies 10 days to collect the [certifications of compliance](#) from local school governing bodies, and then sign them and return them to the federal department.

The new demand stems from a [February letter](#) threatening to rescind federal funds for schools that use DEI, or race-conscious practices, in admissions, programming, training, hiring, scholarships and other aspects of student life.