

Oregon News

POLITICS

Lawmakers call for Oregon Department of Transportation reforms

Statesman Journal | By Anastasia Mason

Senator Bruce Starr, R-Dundee, is a co-vice chair of the Joint Committee on Transportation and will lead creation of a draft accountability plan to be presented to the committee in March.

"I know that we have a credibility problem," **Starr** said.

"We can't just throw more money at the Department of Transportation and assume that they're gonna perform better," he said.

Starr was elected to the House in 1998 and served as a state senator for District 15 from 2003 until 2015.

He was a city councilor in Dundee before being reelected in the Legislature in November 2024 to represent [Senate District 12](#), which includes parts of Polk and Yamhill counties and communities such as Dallas, Sheridan and McMinnville.

He co-founded a Christian preschool and has worked as a fence contractor.

Starr's seat was previously held by Brian Boquist, who was a co-vice chair of the Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation and Modernization when HB 2017 was created.

Details about the accountability recommendations, including who will make up the group that makes them, are not yet decided, Starr said, but he emphasized a role for Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, R-Albany.

With Oregon's 2 largest federal climate grants on hold — for now — state agencies are left at a standstill

OPB | By Monica Samayoa

A nearly \$200 million federal grant aimed at boosting climate action throughout Oregon is currently frozen — for now. It's causing uncertainty throughout state agencies that worked together to help win the competitive award and say they are unsure if and when the federal funds would become accessible. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality said Thursday at least six federal grants awarded to the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and boost current climate action programs are currently frozen.

Gov. Tina Kotek places Oregon Youth Authority director on leave amid 'backlog' of abuse complaints

Oregon Live | By Noelle Crombie

Gov. Tina Kotek late Friday placed the longtime director of the Oregon Youth Authority on administrative leave amid a comprehensive review of the agency's handling of abuse complaints involving youths in state custody.

The developments come as the youth authority confronts a half-dozen [federal civil rights lawsuits](#) alleging [staff members abused underage youths and young adults in custody](#). The claims also accuse supervisors of failing to intervene and report abuse.

The youth authority is part of the state's juvenile justice system. It oversees about 900 youths and manages nine locked facilities, including MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn.

Editorial: Reform prison medical care or bet on more lawsuits

The Oregonian Editorial Board

Oregon Department of Corrections Director Mike Reese seemed to strike a blow for accountability earlier this month when he [fired two top health administrators](#) in his agency and hired a consultant to conduct a "comprehensive review" of the state's troubled prison health system.

But even considering Reese's short tenure at the corrections department, the alarming allegations raised in the report should not have been a surprise to him or anyone with a passing interest in the corrections department, which oversees 12,000 adult offenders across 12 prisons. The only mystery is whether Reese and Gov. Tina Kotek intend to dramatically reshape the direction of the agency — or just wait out this latest crisis in standard Oregon fashion.

But the volume of concerns, record of litigation, previous reports and first-hand nature of complaints should have prompted more urgent action to remove Roberts and Bugher from overseeing the potentially life-or-death medical care that prisoners receive.

[Oregon targets microplastic pollution with new bill proposals](#)

Statesman Journal | By Tracy Loew

Oregon legislators are trying to further restrict single-use plastic in the state and prevent tiny plastic pieces from reaching waterways.

[Senate Bill 551](#) would ban those heavier bags. It also would prohibit restaurants and convenience stores from automatically providing single-use utensils or condiments and would prohibit lodgings from providing small sizes of toiletries, plastic-wrapped soaps or other single-use items.

[Senate Bill 526](#) would require new clothes washers sold in the state, beginning in 2030, to have microfiber filters to catch plastic fibers from clothes.

[“We Will Not Be the Same Bureau,” PBOT Director Warns as Budget Crisis Looms](#)

Willamette Week | By Sophie Peel

PBOT’s budget crisis, unlike that of other bureaus that suffer when the city’s general fund dips, is existential: PBOT is mostly funded by gas taxes and parking revenues. But both of those cash sources have steadily declined in recent years, leaving the bureau with a funding gap for the past seven consecutive years. (Cuts have been largely averted, though, thanks to last-minute maneuvers to fill the holes. That’s unlikely to happen this year, given the overall budget crunch.)

Williams said Wednesday morning her bureau was staring down a \$38 million budget gap this upcoming fiscal year that, if it’s not whittled down in a meaningful way, would affect nearly every primary service the bureau provides: street and sidewalk repairs and maintenance, paving, pedestrian safety improvements, and street cleaning.

Unlike last year, when the former City Council filled much of the city’s budget holes with unanticipated excess revenue from the Portland Clean Energy Fund (including \$8 million to help close PBOT’s deficit), the current council seems unlikely to consider such moves. That leaves PBOT in a difficult, and worse, position than it was in this time last year.

[Parents Say a School District Failed to Properly Teach Reading—and the Oregon Department of Education Is Letting It Slide](#)

Willamette Week | By Joanna Hou

A few years later, as her younger child continued to struggle, Bohanan started looking deeper into how the district had been teaching him how to read. She realized that the district’s reading curriculum wasn’t on the Oregon Department of Education’s approved curriculum lists.

As [Oregon Public Broadcasting](#) first reported two years ago, West Linn-Wilsonville School District administrators acknowledged that “years ago, their predecessors didn’t completely follow the compliance process” around curriculum. The district adopted a new, compliant reading curriculum in spring 2024 and implemented it for this academic year.

But parents say the district should still be held accountable for those years when it was out of compliance. (Exactly how many years remains a matter of dispute.) They say the district should be required to share its mistakes with the public through a formal corrections process.

Hruska says that an honor system is not the best way to hold school districts accountable—especially for districts that have been noncompliant in the past.

[Rural Oregonians Are Already Choking on Utility Bills. Trump’s Executive Orders Could Make Matters Worse.](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

Presidential executive orders are creating panic at the Portland-based Bonneville Power Administration, which is part of the federal Department of Energy.

Operating the dams and the transmission grid is highly specialized work. It will be made more complicated by Trump's ["fork in the road" policy](#), urging federal employees to retire early and by new executive orders [freezing hiring](#) and [mandating](#) that for every 4 employees who leave government service, only 1 can replace them.

[Portland City Councilors urge Providence to resolve nurses' strike](#)

OPB | By Alex Zielinski

On Monday, nearly all Portland City Councilors signed on to a letter urging Providence to return to the bargaining table with the Oregon Nurses Association to resolve the strike.

The letter, signed by 11 councilors, encourages management to meet the union's requests to increase wages and improve workplace safety.

The statewide strike, which began on Jan. 10, is the largest nurses strike in Oregon history. While some workers have returned to work after reaching a deal with Providence, [several thousand nurses at seven hospitals](#) — from Hood River to Medford — remain on the picket line.

[Klamath Tribes push to restore wetlands and wocus in Southern Oregon](#)

OPB | By Cassandra Profita

In the spring and early summer, the [wocus plants](#), also known as pond lilies, have bright yellow flowers on them. By August, most of those flowers have turned into seed pods. Gathering these wocus pods is a tradition Garin Riddle inherited from his ancestors, who have eaten their highly nutritious seeds for thousands of years.

Starting in the early 1900s, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation drained many of the lakes that used to provide habitat for wocus and replaced them with a massive irrigation system and [hundreds of thousands of acres](#) of new farmland. In aerial views of the region, square tracts of green, irrigated land are visible in areas that used to be Lower Klamath Lake and Tule Lake.

Dams, dikes and irrigation ditches move water from the lake to farms and ranches across the upper Klamath Basin. Now, Mitchell said, only a few places have the right amount of water for wocus plants. To protect their longstanding wocus gathering tradition and the habitat it depends on, the Klamath Tribes have advocated for [projects that restore the wetlands](#) that used to dominate the Southern Oregon landscape and provide rich wildlife habitat that experts often describe as ["the Everglades of the West."](#)

[Moving beyond addiction: Portland-area advocates, police see signs of improvement](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Ben Botkin

On this day, he drove slowly through a lot at a city park shelter, where he found a man with methamphetamine and paraphernalia. They talked and another police officer arrived to put the man in handcuffs and search him.

He was not sent to jail. Jose Martinez, an outreach supervisor for 4D Recovery, a treatment and recovery provider in Washington County and the Portland area, arrived. Police introduced Martinez to the man, who received a citation for misdemeanor drug possession — and encouragement to enter recovery. Washington County is one of 28 counties in Oregon that have launched deflection programs, which offer treatment to people caught with a small amount of drugs. With the recriminalization of low-level drug possession in Oregon on Sept. 1, the idea is to avoid packing the jails while helping people in addiction recover.

Deflection services start with an assessment of the person to determine what they need, from counseling to medication and therapy. They are expected to stay in the program for up to six months and there is no requirement that people maintain sobriety for a certain length of time.

[Oregon election officials ask justice department to investigate three noncitizen voters](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway

But last September, a call from the Chicago-based nonprofit Institute for Responsive Government prompted DMV officials to take a closer look at how they were handling automatic voter registration. They found that some foreign passports and birth certificates were mistakenly marked as U.S. passports

and birth certificates, meaning that people who didn't prove citizenship were being registered to vote automatically.

And they later learned that about 300 people from the U.S. territories of American Samoa and Swains Island were wrongly registered to vote. Those territorial residents have U.S. passports and are allowed to vote in party presidential nominating elections, but they're not U.S. citizens and can't vote in other elections.

Since then, the DMV changed the layout of the software front-desk workers use in order to make it harder to accidentally enter the wrong type of identification and added prompts to ensure workers double-check documents. The DMV also reviews its records and publishes a monthly report, and since November it has found no new mistaken registrations.

Legislative Republicans, meanwhile, are pushing for a permanent end to the motor voter law. House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, introduced [House Bill 3473](#) to block the DMV from automatically sending information to election officials and instead require Oregonians to proactively fill out a voter registration card.

Drazan also signed on to [House Bill 2442](#), to require Oregonians to prove citizenship before they register to vote. Federal law only requires voters to attest to being citizens, with the warning that they could face federal criminal charges if they aren't.

[Oregon health researchers, Wyden decry Trump's 'lawless' efforts to cut funding](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Ben Botkin

In 2024, OHSU received \$352 million from the NIH, the equivalent of about 60% of its research grants. A slice of that is now in peril. The Trump administration wants to whittle down the so-called "indirect costs," or the overhead costs of keeping research labs running. For OHSU, that would mean a cut of somewhere between \$60 million and \$80 million, said Peter Barr-Gillespie, OHSU's executive vice president.

[Federal immigration officials have extensive technology at their disposal](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Paige Gross

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Citizen and Immigration Services have spent \$7.8 billion on immigration technologies from 263 different companies since 2020, the [New York Times reported](#) this week. The technologies include biometric tracking, such as facial recognition, voice analyzing, and fingerprint scanning, location tracking via software and ankle monitoring and rapid DNA testing tools.

[Southern Oregon high school teacher arrested on sexual abuse charges](#)

Oregon Live | By Julia Silverman

A former teacher at [Rogue River Junior-Senior High School](#) in Southern Oregon was arrested on Saturday on multiple counts of sexual abuse of a former student, police there said.

[Passenger train hits person on track north of Oregon City](#)

Oregon Live | By Julia Silverman

An Amtrak Cascades train en route from Eugene to Seattle on Sunday struck and killed a woman who was walking either on or near the tracks north of Oregon City, the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office said.

[Portland recorded more homicides than Seattle in 2024. What's behind the violence?](#)

Oregon Live | By Zaeem Shaikh

Portland recorded another troubling year of deadly violence in 2024, when 71 people died by [homicide](#), including three people killed by police and one person who died from long-term complications tied to a 2004 shooting. That overall number is slightly less than in 2023, when [77 people died by homicide](#), including two fatal shootings by police.

The numbers, while high compared with Portland's historic annual average of 30 homicides, follow [two years of even higher bloodshed](#) amid the pandemic. Police and elected leaders have applauded the downward trend, saying it's fueled in part by a drop in gang-related killings.

But other U.S. cities that also experienced a spike in violence amid the pandemic have seen their numbers fall even lower than Portland's. For example, Seattle, which has about 120,000 more people than Portland, recorded 58 homicides last year, down from a three-decade record of 73 the year before. San Francisco recorded 35 killings last year, down from 51 in 2023.

In 2023, police said close to a quarter of the city's homicides involved a homeless person, but that figure included both victims and alleged perpetrators. Counting the same way, police said roughly a third of 2022's killings involved homeless people.

[Readers respond: Keep Oregon estate tax](#)

The Oregonian

None fixes either of the clear problems with our estate tax. First, [the \\$15 million estate tax loophole](#) passed in 2023 needs serious work, and second, the lack of an Oregon gift tax.

[Effort in 'red' swath of Oregon to join Idaho gets new life, as political secession has had mixed results](#)

Fox News | By Charles Creitz

Greater Idaho began putting such measures up for votes in various counties in 2020 and this month saw Republican lawmakers file a bill in the state legislature that would create a task force to study "moving" the border.

State Rep. Mark Owens, R-Malheur, put forward HB 3844, a measure that creates and directs a task force to document the impacts of relocating the Idaho border and requires a report be presented to lawmakers in Salem.