

## **Oregon News**

### **POLITICS**

#### **[Union members call on Gov. Kotek to fire the chief of Oregon Department of Human Services](#)**

*OPB | By Lauren Dake*

Hundreds of members represented by two of the state's largest unions, SEIU and AFSCME, have said they no longer have confidence in [Fariborz Pakseresht](#). In a letter to Gov. Tina Kotek earlier this month, they asked the governor to remove Pakseresht and ensure the agency is run by "an experienced, supportive, and effective director."

But at the heart of the latest issue is a population that is arguably even more vulnerable: those with developmental and intellectual disabilities. And more specifically, those individuals living in state-owned homes often referred to by state workers as [SACU homes, or Stabilization and Crisis Unit homes](#). These homes are situated along the I-5 corridor from Portland to Eugene and house about 90 people. They are the only state-run homes that serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

#### **[Oregon lawmakers agree fighting wildfires requires more money. The hard question: How to pay for it](#)**

*Oregon Live | By Sami Edge*

Oregon's fire agencies routinely draw on their operational budgets to front wildfire bills while they wait for repayment from the federal government, a system that lawmakers and fire agencies have said is unsustainable. That caught up to the agencies last year after a record wildfire season left the state with a more than \$200 million budget hole.

And a wildfire risk map intended to help inform Oregonians and fire fighters about hazard levels property by property has drawn so much ire that lawmakers are calling for the state to blur it so it no longer shows property-specific ratings, or else scrap it entirely.

The other two members, senators Golden from Ashland and **Stayton Republican Fred Girod**, are vocal about their preferences – and have stark differences of opinion.

Golden favors holding back the 2026 kicker, which he argues would keep wildfire needs from drawing too heavily on an already in-demand general fund.

Girod thinks that the state has enough money to foot the bills. He wants to draw wildfire funding from a combination of insurance taxes and lottery proceeds. He said he also agrees with the plan to take \$150 million out of the rainy day fund.

The insurance tax generates roughly \$140 million per two year budget cycle, Girod said, and dedicating 10% of lottery proceeds to fires would produce another \$200 million. Currently, all lottery proceeds are dedicated to other purposes, primarily K-12 schools, natural resources, economic development and higher education.

"I want to fix the problem. There are ways to fix it, it's just you have to be willing to take some cuts. The general fund is where some of it has to come from, and that's the rub," Girod said.

To achieve his plan to redirect one year's kicker to pay for wildfire expenses, Golden would need a two-thirds vote of both chambers of the Legislature. He'd have to recruit all Democrats to his plan and earn the votes of at least two Republican senators and four representatives.

Girod said last week that he hadn't seen much support for diverting the kicker. But he hadn't heard much support for the idea of pulling money from the general or lottery proceeds either.

"It's a question of priorities. We spend billions on... homeless, but we're not willing to pony up to fight fires, and we just have to do that. It's just getting worse and worse," Girod said. "... We're playing Russian roulette here."

As of Tuesday, Girod was feeling more optimistic. He'd made some phone calls and heard support for finding some money in the general fund, he said. "I think there's a pathway forward."

#### **[Oregon Health Authority Director Sejal Hathi has taken a side gig in California](#)**

*The Lund Report | By Nick Budnick*

Stanford University is touting its hire of Hathi, a prominent state official and a physician, to see patients at the teaching hospital. It's a paid position, but Hathi said she is talking to the university about how to avoid receiving compensation.

#### [Oregon elected a record number of BIPOC legislators. They insist Trump 'is not stopping us'](#)

*Oregon Live | By Aimee Green*

BIPOC Caucus leaders gathered Wednesday to lay out their legislative agenda for the session that stretches from January to June, saying they won't back down from their goal of creating a future "where every person, no matter their background, is valued and supported." That's even if Trump continues to try to sidestep Congress and the courts to cut off federal funding.

#### [Oregon regulatory changes will roll out with 'more consistency,' Gov. Tina Kotek pledges](#)

*Oregon Live | By Carlos Fuentes*

[Gov. Tina Kotek](#) on Wednesday directed state agencies to abide by stricter public engagement requirements for proposed regulatory changes, maintain an annual calendar of proposed rulemaking, other changes.

A [2023 survey](#) by state business lobby Oregon Business and Industry found that three-quarters of surveyed businesses struggled to keep up with frequently-changing regulations affecting their business. According to the business interest group, state agencies proposed 500 regulations changes over a six-month period last year.

In a press release, Kotek said the new requirements will improve the state's customer service and efficiency. The new requirements will go into effect as early as this May.

Kotek's directive, however, doesn't address all concerns from critics. Republican lawmakers have [introduced a bill](#) this legislative session that would require agencies to create advisory committees for all proposed regulatory changes that would alter compliance obligations or increase costs for affected groups. Agencies are currently encouraged, but not required, to create such committees.

#### [Red tape is slowing state in meeting housing goals, Kotek says in KATU interview](#)

*KATU | By Steve Dunn*

She said the state needs to stay the course and that thousands of people have not become homeless and people are getting re-house.

"But we are not out of the woods yet," she said. "Progress is happening, but we have to pay for it. So that shelter, that's eviction prevention, that's re-housing money. It's money to build housing. More money for infrastructure to get new housing produced. Because if we don't build more housing, we're never going to get at the affordability issue."

#### [Lawmakers Ponder Retail Delivery Fee](#)

*Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss*

After months of intensive work on how to bolster funding for the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee is preparing to unveil a package of funding options to augment the gas tax and vehicle registration fees.

One new idea: a fee on retail deliveries by companies such as Amazon and Door Dash. Colorado implemented such a fee in 2022 and raises about \$70 million a year from it.

#### [With federal funds at risk, bills face a difficult path through Oregon Legislature](#)

*OPB | By Bryce Dole*

Oregon is facing potential funding cuts amid the Trump administration's efforts to dramatically downsize federal spending. More than [31% of the state's budget](#) comes from the federal government.

At the same time, lawmakers are weighing [an expensive transportation package](#) — with the potential for new taxes or fees — and proposals from Gov. Tina Kotek to [ramp up funds for schools](#), [housing and behavioral health](#).

At the same time, Oregon's elected officials are seeing bills filed that would cut into state revenue, such as those with one-time payments for projects or proposals to repeal the corporate activity tax, establish

an income tax credit for volunteer firefighters and grant a higher property tax exemption to veterans with disabilities.

“Basically all these other things out there are good ideas and might actually help people,” **Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer**, said. “But in light of everything else, in context with the whole universe we’re dealing with, I think there’s less of a chance this time than there was last time.”

Even bills with bipartisan support are facing dim prospects. For a third legislative session, Thatcher is cosponsoring a bill with Democrats to give military retirees a tax break. It aims to encourage veterans younger than 63 to live and work in Oregon while also providing relief to military retirees living on their pensions.

But Thatcher and Meek, who is also supporting the legislation, said its chances of passing this year are slimmer than its last time before lawmakers in 2024.

### [Money, special education, cellphones and safety: Some key education bills in Oregon’s 2025 legislative session](#)

*OPB | By Natalie Pate*

Oregon lawmakers kicked off the 2025 legislative session last week. Over the next several months, state leaders will decide on dozens of key education issues — from school funding and accountability measures to student health and safety.

Kotek’s [proposed budget](#) for the 2025-27 biennium includes [\\$11.3 billion](#) for Oregon’s 197 school districts, as well as additional investments into Oregon’s Early Literacy Initiative and Summer Learning programs.

### [Oregon bill seeks OHA’s involvement in Missing and Murdered Indigenous People response](#)

*OPB | By Brian Bull*

An effort to improve response to reports of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) in Oregon is underway in the Oregon state legislature.

State Rep. Tawna Sanchez is building on [HB 2625](#), a 2019 bill she co-sponsored that created talking sessions between tribal communities and state agencies, including the Oregon State Police.

Now, Sanchez has rolled out [HB 3198](#), which aims to have Oregon’s nine federally-recognized tribes and urban communities partner up with another state agency.

### [Moving Beyond Addiction: Oregonians have mixed feelings about new deflection programs](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Ben Botkin*

Oregonians are cautiously optimistic about the state’s new approach to helping people addicted to drugs, but they remain worried that people still struggle to access limited services for treatment, a Capital Chronicle survey and interviews show.

A majority of people are concerned about the reality of overcoming addiction while living in the shadows, even with the new programs. Nearly 60% who responded to the survey said easy access to drugs on the streets is a barrier people face who are addicted to fentanyl and other illicit drugs.

That remains true in the months since Oregon lawmakers passed [House Bill 4002](#) in 2024, which recriminalized low-level drug possession and allowed counties to start deflection programs.

### [‘Astronomical’ bust shows meth trafficking’s stubborn grip on Oregon](#)

*Oregon Live | By Maxine Bernstein*

The bust a year ago — and another investigation that netted nearly 80 pounds of methamphetamine around the same time — show the reach of Mexican cartels along the West Coast and the continuing devastation of the drug in Oregon.

While recent news coverage has focused on [fentanyl flooding Portland](#) and leading to [increased overdose deaths](#), methamphetamine is the second leading cause of overdoses in the state and has ravaged Oregonians for much longer, Kerin said.

Today, most methamphetamine sold in the U.S. is now made in industrial quantities and in a highly pure form in “super” laboratories in Mexico. Once shipped across the U.S. border, Mexican crime

organizations control most of the wholesale distribution, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. Often, methamphetamine is hauled with other drugs, including fentanyl, heroin or cocaine.

#### [\\$4 million proposed in Oregon for disadvantaged community water research](#)

*Capital Press | By Mateusz Perkowski*

Oregon lawmakers are considering a proposal to invest \$4 million in studies and grants intended to resolve water problems faced by disadvantaged communities. House Bill 3528 would allocate \$3.2 million to the University of Oregon for research on the water needs of “environmental justice communities” and \$800,000 to Portland State University for water studies involving tribal communities.

#### [Fatal forklift crash at Benson High construction site stemmed from ‘flawed decisions,’ state finds](#)

*Oregon Live | By Zane Sparling*

The [death of an apprentice ironworker at Benson Polytechnic High School’s renovation](#) could have been prevented by finding a safer method to move staircase railings, state investigators determined.

#### [Oregon lawmakers seek to make utility bills more affordable, transparent](#)

*Oregon Live | By Gosia Wozniacka*

State lawmakers are working on legislation that would give Oregon regulators broader discretion in setting power rates, with the aim of making energy bills more affordable, reducing the number of bill increases and making utility costs more transparent for customers. The new legislation, dubbed the Fair Energy Act, would reform the rate-setting process to focus on the customers. It would direct the Public Utility Commission to take into account the cumulative economic impact of a proposed rate increase or schedule of rate increases on ratepayers. PGE plans to invest [more than \\$1 billion annually](#) during the next five years on transmission grid modernization, renewable energy integration and wildfire mitigation efforts, more than 20% above its investment rate during the last decade. The utility, which serves about 930,000 customers in Oregon across seven counties, declined to comment on the new bill.

### **TRUMP**

#### [Trump’s firing of Forest Service workers raises concerns about wildfires in Oregon, the West](#)

*OPB | By April Ehrlich*

Since last week, the Forest Service has fired at least 2,000 employees, according to a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Forest Service. That’s raising concerns among some employees, who say they’re worried about how the Trump administration’s staffing cuts will affect fire season — particularly in the vast wildlands that make up Oregon and the West.

#### [Senators grill Trump’s Oregon labor secretary nominee on union support](#)

*Oregon Live | By Sami Edge*

Oregon [politician Lori Chavez-DeRemer](#) took fire from both sides of the aisle at her confirmation hearing Wednesday to become the country’s next labor secretary, as senators lobbed questions designed to ferret out whether the Trump nominee is too pro-union or not union enough, willing to butt heads with Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency or committed to doing President Donald Trump’s bidding regardless of legal prohibitions.

#### [Legal battles escalate over Trump executive order on birthright citizenship](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle*

The Trump administration Wednesday [appealed](#) a nationwide injunction in a suit brought by a coalition of Democratic attorneys general challenging President Donald Trump’s executive order that aims to redefine the right to birthright citizenship enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.

#### [Trump removes remaining U.S. attorneys, including Oregon’s](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Conrad Wilson*

Oregon U.S. Attorney Natalie Wight was fired by the White House as President Donald Trump vowed to continue his reshaping of the U.S. Department of Justice.

### **EDUCATION**

### **Report Suggests Oregon Should Spend More on Education**

*Willamette Week* | By Joanna Hou

In 2024, Oregon Senate Bill 1552 asked for a review and evaluation of the Quality Education Model. The QEM, which projects the cost to adequately educate students statewide, has long been cited by school funding advocates as evidence the state is underfunding education. In recent years, the model has faced increased scrutiny, which helped prompt the reevaluation.

Currently, the QEM hinges on achieving just one outcome—a 90% graduation rate for Oregon students. As *WW* has previously reported ([“Money for Nothing,” Feb. 5](#)), increased education spending over the past decade has not improved student outcomes.

### **Oregon public school enrollment levels off, with no sign of rebound from deep post-pandemic losses**

*Oregon Live* | By Julia Silverman

Oregon public schools are educating about 2,300 fewer students now than in the 2023-24 school year, according to [newly released data](#) from the Oregon Department of Education.

That’s a tiny 0.4% drop from the previous year, which is less precipitous than the [enrollment drops](#) of the past few years, suggesting that the [pandemic era’s exodus](#) from public schools is moderating but not bouncing back.

Demographers at Portland State University’s Population Research Center have traced the enrollment drops to a declining birth rate and high housing costs that have pushed some Oregonians to leave the state. Last year, about [6,200 more people moved away](#) from Oregon than moved to the state, most often to California, Washington, Arizona and Texas, census data show.

So far, the enrollment fluctuations have not translated into plans to close schools, either in the metro area or statewide, on a widespread basis.

### **Commentary: Two investments in children would create brighter future for them and the state**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle* | By Dana Hepper, Alejandro Queral

It is vital that we, as a state, do what we can to ensure that children have a good start in life. There are a number of investments that the 2025 Oregon Legislature could make in that regard. Two of these would put more resources into Employment Related Day Care and strengthen the Earned Income Tax Credit, policies that strengthen family finances.