

Oregon News

POLITICS

Bill would end bar on unemployment benefits for strikers

Northwest Labor Press | By Don McIntosh

“We are living through a moment of egregious inequality.” That’s how Oregon state rep Ben Bowman (D-Tigard) kicked off a Feb. 6 hearing on a bill that could give workers a little more power when they bargain collectively with employers.

Introduced by State Senator Kathleen Taylor (D-Milwaukie) at the request of the Oregon AFL-CIO, the bill is the number one priority for organized labor in this year’s legislative session. Similar legislation has been introduced in Washington state.

At the Feb. 6 hearing, Unemployment Insurance director Lindsi Leahy told committee members that she doesn’t expect the bill to have a meaningful impact on the unemployment insurance trust fund or the projected tax rates that employers pay. That’s because strikes are relatively rare and short-lived.

Business groups, small and large, oppose the bill, arguing that it will financially burden employers and destabilize the unemployment insurance system.

The bill would apply to both private and public sector workers. The two Republicans on the Senate Labor and Business Committee — Cedric Hayden (Fall Creek) and Daniel Bonham (The Dalles) — expressed concern that school districts and other public employers would take a budget hit because public employers reimburse the Employment Department dollar for dollar for unemployment benefits.

Listen: Audits reveal ODOT projects from 2017 funding package are over budget and behind schedule

OPB | By Gemma DiCarlo

In 2017, Oregon lawmakers passed a transportation package that was expected to generate \$5.3 billion. Eight years later, revenue forecasts show [funding has fallen short](#) of projections, leaving the Oregon Department of Transportation with an ongoing budget crisis. Audits have revealed that ODOT is [failing to meet accountability measures](#) set up in the legislation, and many of its projects are [behind schedule and over budget](#).

Kotek, Drazen agree: Mental health bill 'incredibly important'

KOIN | By Elise Haas

The [new bill, SB 171](#), redefines “danger to self and others” as well as “unable to provide basic needs.” It’s backed by the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) and allows commitments if harm is likely within 30 days and clarifies specific criteria for those unable to meet their basic needs.

Because the current law is vague, case law set a precedent that has made “danger” be interpreted as ‘about to commit suicide or homicide.’ The bar for “inability to provide basic needs” is so low people suffer with mental illness on the streets. In 2022, Oregon ranked near the bottom for access to mental health care.

“It is incumbent on the governor herself to be able to commit to prioritizing more beds for people that need that level of care,” Drazen told KOIN 6 News. “We’re talking about no access for people that haven’t committed a crime, who so desperately need intensive, intensive residential supports, and there’s just nowhere for them to go right now.”

Oregon insiders: Who's who in and around state government

Oregon Capital Insider | By Dick Hughes

Dr. Sejal Hathi, director of the Oregon Health Authority, has taken a side gig as a part-time faculty member in the Stanford University School of Medicine, where she earned her medical degree. As first reported by The Lund Report, Hathi will work one weekend a month seeing patients at Stanford in California.

Multiple criminal cases against PSU protesters dropped after attorneys discover footage

OPB | By Troy Brynson

Last spring, dozens of police descended on the Portland State University campus. It had been three days since protesters began to occupy the Branford Price Millar Library to protest the U.S.'s role in the war in Gaza.

Fast-forward to January, six defendants had all their charges dismissed. Each for the same reason: prosecutors had failed to turn over video evidence, in violation of the law.

'Unleash American blackouts': Experts warn Bonneville job cuts bring immediate and long-term risks to Pacific Northwest

OPB | By Kyra Buckley

Bonneville Power Administration — a Department of Energy agency crucial to providing electricity to Pacific Northwest homes and businesses — has [slashed more than 400 positions](#). That includes 100 fired probationary employees, another 90 people who had received job offers from BPA and then had them rescinded, and more than 200 employees who resigned and took a buyout. A fraction of those jobs specifically protected by federal law were [restored recently](#).

Employees leaving the agency include [linemen, engineers, and substation operators](#) — people with years of required training to respond to power outages and intense weather events that could damage the electric grid.

BPA manages around 15,000 miles of high voltage transmission lines that help feed power to more than 3 million people in the Northwest.

Wildfire season is rapidly approaching — a time when BPA employees carefully maintain and watch transmission lines that could spark fires. The federal utility has long helped respond to electrical equipment damaged in blazes. Dotson is concerned that Oregonians could feel the impact of the job cuts sooner rather than later.

New report paints dark picture for Portland's economy

KATU | By Victor Park

It sure may seem like Portland's economy is booming, but much of that are leftovers of projects approved around 2017, when Portland ranked number three in national real estate attraction.

However, Portland now ranks second to last at number 80, [according to Urban Land Institute](#) in the latest State of the Economy report.

DOE's spending 'rose by an astonishing 749%' in 25 years: government watchdog group

National News Desk

When it comes to waste and fraud, a government watchdog group found federal spending outpaced staff growth and inflation at agency after agency -- and you can see it all for yourself.

Moving Beyond Addiction series documents Oregon's new chapter in its fight against drugs

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Ben Botkin

The deflection programs in the populous Portland area have more resources than elsewhere in the state, with a temporary center where police drop off candidates for assessment and plans for a 24-hour crisis and stabilization center that will likely open in late 2026, with up to 50 beds.

In Clatsop County along the coast, a region that's long battled homelessness and addiction, the deflection program is tailored toward incentives to keep people enrolled. They get small amounts of cash on a cellphone app and other incentives when they keep showing up for group sessions.

Peer recovery workers follow up after someone is arrested, armed with information that police give them. They make phone calls, knock on doors and visit homeless camps, hoping to make the initial connections to help people.

Economist warns of Portland 'doom loop'

Oregon Live | By Matthew Kish

In a "doom loop," economic activity falls, which leads to decreased tax revenue, which makes it harder to pay for public services and spark the economy.

[ECONorthwest's report](#) also showed the local economy is no longer moving in lockstep with the national economy.

"One thing has been certain for almost three decades," said Andrew Hoan, CEO of the Portland Metro Chamber, the city's chamber of commerce. "As the U.S. economy grows, Portland, Oregon, grows faster. And as the economy across the United States shrinks or contracts, we shrink harder and contract harder. The news today is hard to share, but that is no longer the case. While the U.S. economy continues to expand, our community is not."

[Portland's highest salaried city employee gets 3rd raise in a year amid looming layoffs, cuts](#)

Oregon Live | By Shane Dixon Kavanaugh

Questions about Jordan's annual salary and what kind of raise he stood to receive under a six-month job extension proposed by [Mayor Keith Wilson](#) have emerged as Portland leaders grapple with a growing financial shortfall and the prospect of significant layoffs at the city.

[How young is too young to marry? Any age under 18, says a bill before the Oregon Legislature](#)

Oregon Live | By Aimee Green

Sollman, a Hillsboro Democrat, has teamed up with two of her Republican colleagues to sponsor a bill she says they all agree upon: Raising the minimum marrying age in Oregon to 18 with no exceptions. Currently, 17 year olds can marry if one of their parents consent, and parents don't always act in their children's best interests, Sollman said.

"The research shows that children, especially girls, who are married under the age of 18 are more likely to experience poverty, domestic violence, high-risk adolescent pregnancies, mental health and substance use disorders and often have limited opportunities for educational and career advancement," Sollman told the Senate Judiciary Committee.

In addition to Sollman, a Democrat, [Senate Bill 548](#) also has garnered the chief sponsorship of [Sen. David Brock Smith](#), a Port Orford Republican, and [Sen. Kevin Mannix](#), a Salem Republican. Eighteen other legislators have signed on as sponsors.

No one testified in opposition to the bill.

[Oregon wheelchair right-to-repair bill passes state Senate, heads to House](#)

Fox 12 | By Ezra Kaplan

The Oregon state Senate voted on Thursday to overwhelmingly pass [a new right-to-repair bill that covers mobility devices](#).

The law would require wheelchair manufacturers to make it easier to fix their products when they break.

[Oregon expands resources to gender-affirming care amid Trump executive orders](#)

KGW | By Amy-Xiaoshi DePaola

The free toolkit comes after another resource page was launched by the Oregon Department of Justice to help residents understand the state's sanctuary laws.

[Oregon pays \\$116,000 a month for Measure 110-era helpline](#)

Oregon Live | By Noelle Crombie

The Oregon Health Authority [has extended its contract](#) with a Boston-based nonprofit to operate a helpline established under the mostly defunct Measure 110 even as call takers [field a relatively small number of calls](#).

The state agreed to pay the group \$116,362 a month starting in February and continuing through June, according to the contract, released in response to a public records request.

The helpline took fewer than 200 calls from October through December, the period when Oregon rolled out a new law making minor drug possession a crime again.

HEALTH CARE

[Oregon Health Authority Director Sejal Hathi defends outside job at legislative hearing](#)

The Lund Report | By Nick Budnick

Stanford University School of Medicine's announcement of hiring her as faculty had sparked debate and criticism of Hathi's new job in recent days — though Hathi has said she does not intend to collect any pay for the position, and only wants to fly to California once a month.

Hathi's Oregon position pays \$265,488 annually, oversees a \$17 billion-a-year budget and is considered one of the toughest jobs in state government — overseeing care for 1.4 million low-income Oregonians as well as several other programs.

Not only that, but working at an Oregon hospital would pose a conflict of interest and working at a clinic is out of her league because she lacks that expertise, Hathi said.

[Opinion: OHSU's acquisition of Legacy Health likely to worsen the state's affordability crisis](#)

The Lund Report | By Bill Kramer

Oregon has a health care affordability crisis, and many, many Oregonians are suffering. Nearly three quarters of respondents to a 2024 survey reported delaying or foregoing care in the past 12 months due to costs. That's over 3 million Oregonians. Health insurance premiums for individuals in the Oregon Health Insurance Marketplace are going up by an average of 8% next year. For small groups, the average increase is 12% -- some are as high as 16%. And we know that high health care costs worsen health and wealth inequities.

[Here are the Oregon counties that spend the most for health care, and those spending the least](#)

Oregon Live | By Kristine de Leon

Health care spending in Clackamas and Deschutes counties averaged roughly \$7,900 per person in 2019, the most of anywhere in Oregon. The spending likely reflects populations who are proactive about seeking medical care when they're feeling ill and have the insurance or money to cover it.

On a per-person basis, health care spending in Oregon rose from \$5,888 in 2010 to \$7,205 in 2019, a 22% increase. This growth outpaced the national growth rate of 16% during the same period. However, despite the faster growth, Oregon still spent less on health care per person by the dollar amount than the national average.

EDUCATION

[Bipartisan congressional group hopes to restore bill providing millions in rural school funding](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt

Oregon's U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, and two Idaho Republicans — U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch — announced Feb. 4 that they are reintroducing the [Secure Rural Schools Act](#) that was left to die without a vote by U.S. House Republicans last December.

[Oregon schools need 30% more funding per student to improve outcomes, new report reveals](#)

KATU | By Christina Giardinelli

Over the past few years, Oregon's largest School Districts have seen [layoffs](#), teachers' [strikes](#), and more recently have taken to publicly announcing [massive budget deficits](#) while [calling for parents](#) to contact their lawmakers.

A new report lends credence to demands for an increase in education spending pointing to somewhere in the vicinity of \$5k more per student per year -- a roughly 30% increase -- to improve educational outcomes for Oregon students

The report notes that although Oregon's per-pupil spending is higher than the national average, the state also tends to have a higher-than-average percentage of students with disabilities and students with an economic disadvantage thus elevating the cost per pupil need.

The state's recent record-level investment in per-student spending coincided with COVID-19 pandemic learning loss and standard test scores show Oregon is trailing far behind other states when it comes to recouping that loss.

One of the primary issues researchers found with that formula is that it does not allocate enough money to school districts with larger percentages of students with higher learning needs such as economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners.

[Oregon Senate resolution to prioritize school funding gains bipartisan support](#)

KOIN | By Ariel Jacobazzi

Oregon Republican lawmakers in the Senate are backing a push to get more funding into schools across the state even as many school districts face budget woes.

Portland Public Schools is facing a \$40 million budget deficit, for example. Parents attending an education funding forum in North Portland — one of many being held across the state — said the measure could be the answer to the long-standing question of how to fund Oregon schools.

[Senate Joint Resolution 25](#) is already receiving bi-partisan support, said Oregon Senate Republican Leader Daniel Bonham. He said the measure is meant to truly put education first, something he said he and his colleagues have been pushing for years.

“SJR 25 is to fund education first, to not allow it to become a political football,” Bonham said.

“Would it solve the funding crisis? I’m not saying it would lower or raise funds, I’m just saying that if we want to say that this is our top priority and that education is our number one mission then we should fund first, before we consider anything else,” Bonham said.

[Data Suggests Most Districts in Oregon Have Hired More Teachers Since 2016](#)

Willamette Week | By Joanna Hou

Updated national data suggests most school districts in Oregon have increased their teachers since the 2016–17 school year, as staffing has surged while enrollment has declined.

Many Oregon school districts have seen enrollment declines. As [The Oregonian](#) recently reported, the state has lost about 35,000 students since before the pandemic.

The 74’s analysis displays a chart mapping an increase in teachers compared to the 2016–17 school year alongside student enrollment trends, and also highlights student-to-teacher ratios. There were significant teacher increases all over the state.

[To fix what ails Oregon schools, spend a lot more money, new report suggests](#)

Oregon Live | By Julia Silverman

Oregon needs to drastically revamp its [decades-old funding formula](#) and spend far more per pupil to come close to meeting its [stated goals for student success](#), particularly in schools that serve a concentration of students from low-income families, according to a prominent national research institute.

One of those reports says the typical Oregon school needs to spend 33% more per student to give every child a shot at academic success. And it says the additional funding should be heavily weighted toward schools with higher poverty, lower median family incomes and more Black and Latino students.

HOUSING

[Oregon Launches New Program Aimed At Boosting Moderate-Income Housing](#)

FM News

Governor Tina Kotek and Oregon Housing and Community Services Thursday announced the launch of the state’s new Moderate Income Revolving Loan program aimed at increasing housing availability for moderate-income Oregonians. The program will provide zero-interest loans to cities and counties to fund new housing units that lack sufficient financing to begin construction.

Designed as a tool to lower housing costs and increase homeownership opportunities, the MIRL program targets areas where financing gaps are preventing the development of affordable housing.

The program’s revolving structure ensures that once loans are repaid, the funds are reinvested to support future housing projects. This cycle will provide sustained funding to help keep housing within reach for Oregonians struggling to secure enough financing from traditional sources.

Oregon legislators are supportive of the new initiative. “The MIRL fund is a critical tool for local governments trying to bring down the costs of housing projects,” said **Senator Dick Anderson (R-Lincoln City)**. “This is a bipartisan effort that will have a real impact on our communities.”

[This key piece of Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek’s housing effort has finally launched](#)

OPB / By Lauren Dake

The \$75 million “revolving loan fund” is aimed at helping cities and counties boost affordable housing stock. The idea is to create a program to help local governments offer interest-free loans to developers who are building moderate and affordable home projects but have a funding gap. The \$75 million is the starting point and will be replenished once the loans are paid off.

In recent years, the state has funneled millions of dollars toward affordable housing and homelessness prevention. The governor has also pushed for more support for renters and aimed to cut bureaucratic tape so building can happen faster.

Despite the money and a slew of new policies, the state still isn’t building fast enough to meet the governor’s goal of adding 36,000 new housing units a year. The homeless crisis is still raging, and [eviction cases continue to climb](#).

[Oregon will issue loans to help build middle-income homes](#)

Oregon Live / By Jonathan Bach

Oregon will soon begin issuing loans to help developers finance construction of middle-income housing, an increasingly common strategy in other states tackling the nation’s home affordability crisis.