

## **Oregon News**

### **POLITICS**

#### **Gov. Kotek introduces bill that would allow her, future governors, Senate to choose state forester**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle* | By Alex Baumhardt

Following a rough few months of leadership and financial turmoil at the Oregon Department of Forestry — including the abrupt resignation of its director — Gov. Tina Kotek wants to change the law so she and future governors get to pick the agency's leader, rather than the governor-appointed state Board of Forestry. Kotek is proposing [Senate Bill 1051](#), sponsored by Sen. Kayse Jama, D-Portland, to allow the governor to choose the director of the state Department of Forestry, also known as the state forester. The governor-appointed seven members of state Board of Forestry, which oversees rulemaking for the state's Department of Forestry, has historically vetted and chosen the state forester. The state forester reports to the board and oversees the management and protection of 745,000 acres of forestland owned by the state of Oregon, as well as wildfire protection for 16 million acres of forestland in the state. All of this requires negotiating the desires of environmentalists, logging companies, tribes and private property owners.

#### **Oregon House, Senate Republicans outline education priorities, legislation this session**

*KTVZ* | By Barney Lerten

Oregon House and Senate Republicans announced legislation Thursday to dramatically reform public education that includes restoring graduation requirements, expanding options for school choice, and holding education leaders accountable for student outcomes. According to a statewide poll from January 4-7 of this year, 67% of Oregonians support expanding options for school choice, the House GOP members said in a news release.

Later Thursday, Oregon Senate Republicans issued a news release on their comments on the Senate floor on the legislation.

#### **Providence, nurses union reach new tentative deal in 6-week-long strike**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle* | By Lynne Terry

Nurses would be paid more and receive compensation for missing breaks under a tentative agreement reached by Providence Health & Services and the Oregon Nurses Association that could end a six-week-long strike.

Providence and the union announced the new agreement, which comes after union members rejected another deal earlier this month, in separate news releases Friday. Providence said it reached the deal after three days of intensive bargaining.

The deal includes wage increases for nurses from 20% to 42%, with an immediate 16% to 22% raise upon ratification, the union said. It also includes step increases starting next year along with guaranteed pay for missed breaks or meal breaks.

#### **Oregon spends millions to help immigrants fight deportation. It's unclear how many succeed**

*The Oregonian* | By Yesenia Amaro

When Oregon lawmakers in 2022 considered a plan to ensure immigrants facing deportation could receive free state-funded legal representation, proponents could hardly contain their enthusiasm. Three years later, however, the statewide program's effectiveness is difficult to discern and, in some cases, appears to have fallen far short of its lofty goals, according to an investigation by The Oregonian/OregonLive.

State lawmakers who approved \$15 million to [launch](#) the [Equity Corps of Oregon](#) legal program received little information about its progress until last summer, when administrators provided their first [performance report](#). They boasted that about 4,700 people had sought help of some kind from the statewide program, assisting with things like asylum applications and work authorization forms, while providing "the legal representation and navigation support necessary to stop unjust deportations and stabilize families and communities."

### [USDA to restart wildfire grants, Oregon governor says](#)

*Politico | By Natalie Fertig*

The Department of Agriculture will restart some wildfire grants, Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek told POLITICO on Saturday.

Projects to reduce wildfire risk were put on hold around the country when the grants funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act or the Inflation Reduction Act were frozen earlier this month.

### [Oregon AI proposals would prohibit fake explicit images, more](#)

*Statesman Journal | By Dianne Lugo*

Oregon lawmakers have introduced several proposed laws centered around artificial intelligence. Three bills would prohibit creation of fake intimate images. Another bill would prohibit "nonhumans" from using nursing titles.

Gov. Tina Kotek also appointed an AI council in 2023 that last week finalized an "[action plan](#)" to guide AI use in state government "in a way that aligns with Oregon's policies and values and supports state workers in delivering excellent customer service to Oregonians."

[Senate Bill 626](#), sponsored by **Sen. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles**, amends existing crime statutes to include digitally created images. The crime of encouraging child sexual abuse would expand to include videos and pictures altered or made by artificial intelligence. If passed, the bill would immediately go into effect.

### [Hospital, gas stations among Oregon DEQ fines in January](#)

*Statesman Journal | By Tracy Loew*

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality levied six fines in January, totaling \$166,932.

Violations included gas stations failing to follow underground storage tank rules, a tire service company failing to properly manage stormwater and a hospital failing to submit required reports about air emissions.

### [Joint Office of Homeless Services Warns of Upcoming Budget Shortfall of \\$104 Million](#)

*Willamette Week | By Sophie Peel, Anthony Effinger*

Multnomah County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson added new tension to a difficult budget season by announcing today that the Joint Office of Homeless Services now faces a \$104 million budget shortfall. That gap comes despite the Joint Office receiving a significant annual boost from the supportive housing services tax, which provided Multnomah County \$134 million for the current fiscal year ending June 30.

### [Oregon Coast residents pack congressional town hall, hoping for answers](#)

*OPB | By Joni Auden Land*

Hundreds crammed into the gym of Neah-Kah-Nie High School in Rockaway Beach, Oregon, on Saturday, hoping to hear some kind of plan from their elected officials for responding to President Donald Trump and the Republicans that control both chambers of Congress.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, both Democrats, hosted their first town hall in the region since Trump's return to office and heard a wave of confusion and frustration from constituents. Many attendees at the coastal forum told OPB they worried about Trump's mass layoffs of federal workers, potential impacts to efforts to provide more affordable housing and the elevation of billionaire Elon Musk in the White House.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, the lone Republican in Oregon's congressional delegation, held multiple town halls last week and heard plenty from upset voters.

Others wanted to know how Trump's planned cuts to the federal workforce would impact commercial fishing, one of the Oregon Coast's largest industries.

### [Hundreds of educators and parents want to eliminate Oregon's special education funding cap. Here's why](#)

*OPB | By Natalie Pate*

Beiser traveled to Salem to testify on [House Bill 2953](#), which would remove Oregon's cap on special education funding. She was one of hundreds of educators, parents, lawmakers and advocates who [submitted testimony](#) or packed in and around the hearing room on Monday to [speak in favor of the bill](#) before the House education committee. Oregon school districts receive additional money through the state's funding formula based on how many students with disabilities they serve. But the "SPED cap," as it's often called, limits how much they can get. It's been around for decades but isn't keeping pace with the need. As a result, advocates say schools don't have the money they need to properly serve students with disabilities without cutting into programs for other students — and it's causing problems in the classroom.

The state currently caps its additional funding for special education when students with disabilities in a district exceed 11% of total enrollment. However, the portion of students receiving special education services statewide is nearly 15% — more than 82,000 children in the 2023-24 school year. For some districts, that number is even higher.

#### **[Bonneville Power Administration reverses 30 job cuts, continues with plans to eliminate 430 positions](#)**

*OPB | By Courtney Sherwood*

The Bonneville Power Administration is bringing back 30 employees it fired last week, according to multiple sources familiar with the agency's operations.

Roughly 130 of BPA's more than 3,000 employees were told they'd been dismissed last week, as part of large-scale job cuts initiated by the Trump administration. The cuts have largely targeted federal workers in their first year or two on the job, when they are still in probationary status and have fewer civil service protections.

While one person familiar with BPA operations said that the 30 probationary workers whose work will continue are engaged in "mission critical" work, other people knowledgeable with the agency said that other key positions are now vacant, after hundreds of people accepted [an offer to resign now and continue to accept paychecks](#) until fall.

The 240 employees who took that buyout include people who work on power lines, engineers, substation operators and power dispatchers — positions that take years of apprenticeship to learn.

#### **[Editorial peak: TriMet finds its winter footing](#)**

*The Oregonian Editorial Board*

Big storms in previous years have led to drivers [abandoning their cars](#) on the highway, TriMet MAX light-rail trains [sitting idle](#) due to ice and people walking miles in the cold to get home.

But credit TriMet for being better prepared to serve the public this time when snow and freezing temperatures hit earlier this month. Despite a few glitches, TriMet [kept MAX trains running](#), operated buses on snow routes and provided better communication about what people could expect.

#### **[Editorial valley: Paying for a hotline gone cold](#)**

*The Oregonian Editorial Board*

Among the many disappointing outcomes of Oregon's drug-decriminalization experiment was the exceedingly low usage of a hotline that was supposed to help connect drug users with resources. What's even more disappointing is that the Oregon Health Authority would pay a contractor to keep running the expensive hotline when it's clearly unnecessary.

Under Measure 110, ticketed drug users could avoid the \$100 penalty by calling a state-funded hotline where they would undergo screening for substance abuse and receive referrals to services.

But from the start, very few people bothered to phone in. A 2024 story noted that in the first six months of that year, only 73 people had used the hotline, which was run by a Boston nonprofit, Health Resources in Action. The cost worked out to [\\$10,700 per call](#).

Yet, as The [Oregonian/OregonLive's Noelle Crombie reported](#), the Oregon Health Authority recently decided to extend its contract with the nonprofit through June of this year, boosting the \$2.7 million contract to a total of \$3.4 million.

### [Oregon exports bounced back last year, but a nascent trade war has everything in flux](#)

*The Oregonian* | By Mike Rogoway

Oregon exports surged by more than 20% last year, topping \$34 billion and coming within a whisker of an all-time high. The state's economy is heavily reliant on global trade, with Oregon electronics, metals, [wheat](#), wine and many other products sold all over the world.

So from farms to factories, Oregonians are watching closely as the Trump administration wields a fresh round of tariffs and threatens to levy many more.

Tariffs might boost U.S. manufacturing by making foreign products more expensive for domestic buyers, or might ignite a new trade war with retaliatory tariffs that would make Oregon products more costly on the global market.

### [Elon Musk says federal employees must either document their work — or lose their jobs](#)

*OPB* | By Emma Bowman

Federal workers across the U.S. government received an email on Saturday afternoon asking them to account for what they did in the past week — and Elon Musk says they will lose their jobs if they don't respond.

"Consistent with President @realDonaldTrump's instructions, all federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week," [Musk wrote on X](#), which he owns. The post ends: "Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation."

## **LABOR**

### [Portland State University Reaches Impasse With Faculty Union in Labor Negotiations](#)

*Willamette Week* | By Joanna Hou

Portland State University's faculty and academic professionals union declared an impasse Thursday afternoon, moving the campus closer to the first strike in its history.

The bargaining team for PSU's American Association of University Professors has been in negotiations with the university for a new contract since June 2024, says PSU spokeswoman Katy Swordfisk. The university, Swordfisk says, has been "engaged in good-faith" negotiations and started mediation Nov. 15. The union doesn't feel the same way. It says the university has been reluctant to budge on a number of points of contention, including staffing and compensation.

Faculty layoffs are a big sticking point for the union. In December, PSU issued 17 non-tenure track faculty layoff notices, which come as the university faces an \$18 million budget deficit in the upcoming fiscal year. That deficit is caused in part by consistently declining enrollment at the university.

Hews adds researchers, like faculty, have been driven out of living in the PSU area as costs have increased.

### [Portland postal workers rally against Trump USPS changes, 'degraded' conditions](#)

*KOIN* | By Ariel Salk, Jenna Deml

She and more than 100 other Portland postal workers, union leaders and local politicians joined a nationwide "Fight Like Hell" rally Sunday to demand fair wages and protest proposed changes to the United States Postal Service by President Trump. The rally, held at the USPS East Portland Post Office, called for living wages and an end to mandatory overtime, as well as the two-tier workforce system. They also protested against President Donald Trump's [intent to fire the Postal Board of Governors](#), who are responsible for directing an independent USPS.

## **HOUSING**

### [Oregon lawmakers target high screening fees, deposits for renters](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle* | By Julia Shumway

Before they ever sign a lease, start packing boxes or line up moving day help, Oregonians hoping to move into a new rental home can spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars on application fees and deposits.

Some Democratic Oregon lawmakers want to cut those costs. Lawmakers last week considered proposals to ban landlords from charging screening fees and charge landlords who take a holding deposit and then fail to actually rent the apartment, as well as a bill tenant advocates objected to that would allow landlords to charge monthly fees instead of a security deposit.

Nearly 37% of Oregonians rent their homes, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That's higher than the national average, and renters are in the majority in cities including Eugene, Corvallis, Monmouth, Beaverton and Seaside.

Rep. Mark Gamba, D-Milwaukie, introduced [House Bill 2967](#) to ban landlords from charging screening fees.

Sen. Mark Meek, D-Gladstone, described his [Senate Bill 158](#), which received a hearing Wednesday, as a way to help renters get their foot in the door. It would allow landlords to charge a monthly fee instead of a security deposit.

#### [\*\*Lawmakers consider protecting residential utility customers from yearly rate hikes in winter\*\*](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt*

Hundreds of thousands of residential customers of Oregon's private, investor-owned electric utilities in low-income and fixed-income households are struggling to keep up with double digit rate hikes since 2020.

Overall rates for residential customers of both utilities – which collectively serve more than 1.4 million customers in Oregon – are now up about 50% since 2020, with the Public Utility Commission approving increases nearly every year for the past five years. Residential rate increases have risen more than twice the rate of inflation during that period.

To help, Rep. Nathan Sosa, D-Hillsboro, is proposing [House Bill 3179](#), the Fair Energy Act, which would give the Public Utility Commission more power to scrutinize the reasoning for a residential rate increase, and decide when private, investor-owned gas and electric utilities could request them. Sosa discussed the bill Thursday in a divisive legislative hearing in the House Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection that pitted advocates, who said the bill is needed to protect Oregonians, against utility officials, who said it would lead to shareholder disinvestment, and even higher prices.

#### **CRIME & PUBLIC SAFETY**

#### [\*\*Oregon's latest plan to reduce public defense crisis makes it worse, analysis says\*\*](#)

*The Oregonian | By Noelle Crombie*

Despite the [infusion of \\$90 million in 2023](#) into public defense to secure more lawyers, the problem has continued to grow largely unabated with a record 4,371 people accused of crimes lacking representation throughout Oregon. About 150 people accused of crimes are sitting in jails without lawyers, the Judicial Department's latest tally shows.

The 13-member commission, appointed by the governor, pays attorneys to represent indigent defendants.

As of January, lawyers assigned to that division worked at about 85% of their "full-time capacity," while also ranking as "the highest paid public defense attorneys in Oregon" with starting salaries "higher than the national average salary of a public defender with 15 years of experience."

#### [\*\*The CEO of SAIF, the State Workers' Compensation Insurer, Says His Home Was Targeted by Gunfire\*\*](#)

*Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss, Anthony Effinger*

Chip Terhune, CEO of the nonprofit workers' compensation insurer SAIF Corp., told his neighbors in a Facebook message that somebody fired three shots through his front door early Friday morning.

Like any insurer, SAIF sometimes denies claims, which can cause hard feelings, and the shooting carries echoes of the [high-profile murder](#) of a United Healthcare executive in December. But there is no indication or evidence of why somebody shot at Terhune's home.

#### **ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**

#### [\*\*Public advised to avoid the Willamette River after sewage overflow\*\*](#)

*The Oregonian* | By Sami Edge

Sewage and stormwater began [spilling into the Willamette River](#) around 2:30 on Sunday afternoon, when weekend rains overflowed Portland's [Big Pipe](#) system.

**[Pacific lamprey struggle to migrate past the Bonneville Dam. A new fish ladder will help](#)**

*The Oregonian* | By Samantha Swindler

A new \$8 million project at the Bonneville Lock & Dam aims to make it easier for [Pacific lamprey](#) to migrate along the Columbia River.

The project, currently under construction on the Washington side of the dam, involves demolishing and redesigning the upper part of the fish ladder.