

Oregon News

POLITICS

Contractors Sue Kotek Over December Executive Order

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

The Oregon-Columbia Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America, more than a dozen of its members and two other business groups filed a lawsuit Feb. 21 against Gov. Tina Kotek over an [executive order the governor issued Dec. 18](#).

But in the lawsuit they filed late Friday in Marion County Circuit Court, AGC and its member contractors allege that Kotek issued her executive order without legal authority. “The Governor does not have the power under Article III, Section 1 of the Oregon Constitution to require PLAs on public construction projects,” the lawsuit says. The lawsuit goes on to say that Kotek’s order usurps a power reserved to the Legislature.

Providence nurses across Oregon approve deal to end strike

OPB | By Michelle Wiley

After 46 days on strike, nurses at Providence hospitals across Oregon have [approved a deal](#) that will see them return to work.

The deal, which was announced Feb. 21, included some retroactive pay for nurses with contracts that expired before December 2024 – a key sticking point in the negotiations. It guarantees backpay for 75% of the hours worked and paid time off since the contract expired, according to the nurses’ union.

The agreement includes a wage increase over time, ranging from 20% to 42% over the duration of the three-year contract, and an immediate increase of 16% to 22%.

The timing of the agreement ensures that nurses will not lose access to their health insurance.

Providence officials said they would end coverage for striking nurses if a deal was not reached by the end of February.

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek discussed wildfire funding in Trump administration chats last week

OPB | By Dirk VanderHart

Gov. Tina Kotek said Monday she had “constructive conversations” on wildfire funding and the need to adequately staff the Bonneville Power Administration with members of President Donald Trump’s cabinet last week. Those talks – on two of the more pressing issues that have emerged for the Pacific Northwest early in Trump’s administration – came while Kotek was in Washington, D.C. with the National Governors Association. And Kotek has suggested they could bear fruit.

Kotek said she also pressed members of Trump’s cabinet on job reductions at the BPA, which operates 75% of the Northwest’s power grid with electricity from its 31 dams. Terminations at the agency as Trump looks to reduce the size of the federal government have raised worries power outages could become more commonplaces.

Salem’s Center Street Bridge seismic retrofit to begin in 2026

Statesman Journal | By Anastasia Mason

The Oregon Department of Transportation shared new details about the Center Street Bridge seismic retrofit at Monday night’s Salem City Council meeting.

Bidding on the project is anticipated to start in late January 2026, with work starting in spring 2026 continuing into 2028 or 2029.

The Center Street Bridge is one of two across the Willamette River that connects West Salem and Salem. Neither of the bridges — which are used by a combined daily average of about 90,000 vehicles — are expected to be usable in the event of a significant earthquake.

The first phase of the project is estimated to cost between \$130 million and \$200 million. The project was allocated \$60 million due to House Bill 2017. Another \$40 million has been allocated from HB 2017

bridge seismic funds. The rest will come from ODOT's bridge program, potentially by using bonds, an ODOT spokesperson [previously told the Statesman Journal](#).

[Commentary: Lawmakers introduce dozens of proposed constitutional amendments](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Randy Stapilus

Some of the proposals are from Democrats, who hold a supermajority in both chambers, giving them the authority to raise taxes without Republican support. But most are from Republicans. The new Senate Republican leader, Daniel Bonham of The Dalles, is one of the most prolific amendment sponsors, fielding a dozen.

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As in past sessions, one of the most overtly political of topics — redistricting — is proposed for constitutional amendment. Two Senate Joint Resolutions, [8](#) and [21](#), address legislative reapportionment by proposing a redistricting commission, an idea that has failed in the Legislature before. [SJR 14](#) has another twist: It would increase Senate membership from 30 to 36, with each county electing a senator. You might expect that Republicans, long in the minority, would look for ways to impede the majority's ability to act, and you would be right. At least a half-dozen constitutional proposals seek to do just that by changing the rules for passing a measure.

Under current rules, bills pass with a simple majority except revenue raising bills, which require a three-fifths supermajority in favor.

[Senate Joint Resolution 7](#), sponsored by **Republican Sens. Bonham and Kim Thatcher of Keizer** and Rep. E. Werner Reschke of Malin, would require a two-thirds majority in favor in each chamber to pass bills with an emergency clause to enact them sooner than normal. Now, such bills pass with a simple majority.

Another amendment that could have unpredictable effects if passed, [SJR 9](#) by **Republican Sen. Fred Girod of Stayton**, would "prohibit members of the legislative assembly from voting on legislative measures when faced with a conflict of interest. Permits a vote to occur if the legislative entity is otherwise unable to muster sufficient votes to pass or defeat the measure."

Still others would affect voters, or ballot status for ballot issues, directly. Three — [SJR 30](#) and HJR [3](#) and [11](#) — would change the rules for petitions for initiatives, raising the bar for petitioners.

Another, [HJR 5](#) by **Sen. David Brock Smith**, would add a new qualification for running for state office: a maximum age of 72 as of election day. (That would mean that current Republican President Donald Trump would be disqualified from running for Oregon office.)

[INSIDE DOUGLAS COUNTY 2.24.25](#)

KQEN News Radio

Live from Salem, **State Senator David Brock Smith** has an update on wildfire mapping, the budget process, the transportation package and other items.

[Elected officials 'dismayed,' 'appalled' by Multnomah County's homeless budget shortfall](#)

OPB | By Alex Zielinski

Elected leaders across the Portland region and state are fuming after Multnomah County announced a [\\$104 million budget shortfall](#) in its homeless services department — and asked local and state jurisdictions to foot the bill.

Elected officials said they fear how deep cuts to the region's homeless service programs will only worsen the public's trust in the government's ability to address its yearslong homelessness crisis.

Most placed the blame squarely at the feet of Multnomah County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson.

According to Homeless Services Department Director Dan Field, much of the anticipated \$104 million shortfall comes from the fact that the county relied on about \$80 million in temporary funding streams to run ongoing, permanent programs.

[Oregon school districts say lawmakers screwed up light bulb bill](#)

OPB | By Dirk Vanderhart

Oregon lawmakers concerned about climate change had reason to feel good in 2023, when they passed what appeared to be a common sense bill: mandating that buildings swap out fluorescent lights for highly efficient, mercury-free LED bulbs.

But it turns out no one bothered to ask school districts what they thought. Now some of those districts are coming to the Legislature with not-so-feel-good stories.

And swapping outdated fixtures for better options can be prohibitively expensive, school officials say. In the Salem-Keizer School District, the state's second-largest, Superintendent Andrea Castaneda told lawmakers it could cost \$42 million the cash-strapped district can't afford to pull from its general fund to retrofit schools to use LED bulbs.

The 2023 legislation causing all the heartburn, [House Bill 2531](#), barred the sale of some fluorescent bulbs in Oregon beginning in January 2024, and phased in more types of fluorescents this year.

The bill was largely opposed by Republicans, but didn't come with major red flags about new costs. The state's sprawling Department of Administrative Services [told lawmakers](#) it had already transferred 70% of buildings under its purview to LEDs, and may need to stockpile bulbs while it completed the rest, but costs to cities, counties and other agencies was labeled "indeterminate" or "minimal."

[Review of payrolls shows higher hourly pay but lower overall earnings under farmworker overtime law](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt

An Oregon law passed in 2022 to phase in overtime pay for farmworkers has led to higher farmworker wages, but a new study shows hours are being scaled back to avoid overtime pay.

Delbridge and Reimer found that in Oregon, as in studies of California's farm workforce, overtime laws have been increasing hourly wages since 2022 but have led to slight decreases in overall average annual earnings and hours.

As an example, the economists analyzed data from five employees of an Oregon dairy farm who all averaged more than 55 hours a week in 2022. By 2023, their average weekly hours decreased by about six hours, and each saw their weekly wages go down by an average of \$75.

"It's clear that overtime regulation is financially worse for farmers, but it's ambiguous with respect to workers. Some workers will be worse off from the overtime, but I don't think it's true that all workers will be worse off," Dembridge said.

[Judge limits ICE raids in places of worship involved in suit against Trump administration](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Ariana Figueroa

A federal judge in Maryland on Monday partly granted a request from Quakers and other religious groups to limit the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's authority to conduct immigration enforcement in houses of worship.

[Questions over Oregon politician's pay lead Defense Department to terminate agency funding](#)

Oregon Live | By Les Zaitz

Greg Smith's unsupported pay claims and clumsy effort to boost his own pay have resulted in the federal government pulling funding for an agency that was supposed to create jobs, preserve parts of the Oregon Trail and protect wildlife on a former military base in eastern Oregon.

[Key Oregon agency head to step down](#)

Oregon Live | By Sami Edge

Oregon Department of Administrative Services Director Berri Leslie will step down in June, she told staff in an email Tuesday morning.

ADDITION

['34 huge victories': 3 months in, Multnomah County drug deflection shows a 16% success rate](#)

Oregon Live | By Austin De Dios

Multnomah County's [multimillion dollar](#) program designed to keep people caught with hard drugs out of jail and direct them into addiction treatment or shelter has achieved a roughly 16% success rate in its first three months, according to a quarterly report from the county.

[Oregon Health Authority launches opioid addiction care program](#)

Statesman Journal | By Isabel Funk

Hospitals in Marion County have been selected to take part in a new, six-month pilot program run by the Oregon Health Authority to improve addiction care in emergency settings.

The program will train emergency responders to assess patients and provide treatment for opioid use disorder in the field and provide training, tools and "hands-on support" to emergency departments to improve addiction services.

CRIME & PUBLIC SAFETY

[Accused drug traffickers, child predators in ICE's latest 'worst first' arrests](#)

National News Deck

President Donald Trump's deportation mission is bringing more arrests and removals of migrants with ties to gangs, violent criminal histories and allegations of sexual assault in the sweeping crackdown taking place across the country. The administration has said it is targeting illegal immigrants who pose a threat to the public in its initial crackdown before ramping up operations to remove the 11 million estimated people living in the U.S. illegally.

[St Helens sex abuse: Eric Stearns indicted on 11 new sex abuse charges, faces 29 total](#)

KOIN | By Aimee Plante

Months after a St. Helens teacher was accused of sexually abusing students at his high school, more charges were brought against him this week.

During his Monday hearing, Stearns was denied bail. His trial is expected to begin in early June.

[Purported SAIF Shooter Emailed "Threat" to Insurer, Including Employee Names and Addresses](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

Nobody was injured in the shooting, which targeted Terhune's Lake Oswego home at about 4 am Friday, as the Oregon Journalism Project previously reported.

Over the weekend, however, Terhune sent an email to SAIF employees, who number just over 1,000.

"We have received an email threat purporting to be from the person(s) responsible," Terhune wrote in a Feb. 22 email OJP has obtained. "Although it does not target any specific employee, the email references knowledge of employee and relatives' names and addresses."

HOUSING

[Oregon Gov. Kotek, lawmakers push for more regional collaboration for homeless shelters and services](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway

After years of increased state funding to address homelessness and ever-growing numbers of homeless Oregonians, lawmakers and Gov. Tina Kotek are pushing for more state oversight and coordination for homeless shelters.

Kotek's office and Rep. Pam Marsh, D-Ashland, have spent months working on plans for a statewide homeless shelter program. The result, [House Bill 3644](#), would require regional coordination and a focus on getting homeless Oregonians into their own homes, formalizing the regional approach shelter providers and local governments scrambled to put into place after Kotek declared a homelessness state of emergency in 2023.

[Tina Kotek asks Legislature to create a statewide homeless shelter system](#)

Oregon Live | By Lillian Mongeau Hughes

Gov. Tina Kotek showed up Monday at the first hearing on a bill she put forward that would create a statewide homeless shelter system at a cost of \$218 million over the next two years.

According to the governor's housing and homelessness director, Matthew Tschabold, that represents the ongoing cost of supporting the 4,800 shelter beds the state already funds. If lawmakers agree, the state's housing agency would develop a system of regional coordinators to oversee local shelter funding and report back to the Legislature on how many people were served, how much money was spent, what types of services were provided and other metrics to measure shelter success.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

[Oregon bill would require landfills to improve methane monitoring](#)

Statesman Journal | By Tracy Loew

Sen. Sara Gelser Blouin, D-Corvallis, introduced the bill in response to ongoing concerns about methane releases at Coffin Butte Landfill, near Adair Village. In 2022, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found Coffin Butte was [leaking methane](#) at levels that exceed state and federal limits and what the landfill had publicly reported. EPA investigators returned in 2024 and found more than 40 locations where methane exceeded limits, including at holes in the cover material.

[Senate Bill 726](#) would require municipal solid waste landfills to use advanced technology, such as drones, planes or satellites, to measure methane releases.

[Oregon forestry department to plant 2.3 million tree seedlings through 2025](#)

KOIN | By Jashayla Pettigrew

The Oregon Department of Forestry plans to plant around 2.3 million seedlings throughout more than 6,100 acres of harvested timber statewide.

The agency announced that planting will soon occur across the Tillamook, Clatsop and Santiam forests. It is set to begin in the Sun Pass and Gilchrist forests later in May, with planting taking between six weeks to eight weeks — depending on factors like weather and soil conditions.

[Environmental groups challenge Zenith Energy's future fuel operations in Portland](#)

Oregon Live | By Gosnia Wozniacka

Environmental advocates on Monday challenged the city of Portland's decision to issue a controversial land-use credential to Zenith Energy that has paved the way for the company's continued operations along the Willamette River.

EDUCATION

[Opinion: An investment in higher education is an investment in Oregon's economy](#)

The Oregonian

Our legislators and political leadership must recognize that Oregon's approach to higher education funding is limiting opportunities for students and weakening the state's economic future. While other states have made strong investments in their public universities — [keeping tuition costs down](#), expanding programs and driving economic growth — Oregon has yet to take the same steps forward.

Now, Oregon stands out as [one of the worst in per-student public university funding](#) in the country, according to the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. In 1990, the state covered more than 60% of university operating costs; today, it covers less than 30%, shifting the burden to students and families.

