

Oregon News

POLITICS

Democrat Lawmaker Calls Voters ‘Petulant Children’ for Opposing Tax Hikes

Northwest Observer | By Donna Bleiler

Oregon Senate Republican Leader Daniel Bonham (R-The Dalles) responded to comments from **Rep. Mark Gamba (D-Milwaukie)**, who suggested that voters are acting like “petulant children” for opposing tax increases needed to fund infrastructure projects.

[OPB reports](#) on [Senate Bill 687](#), which would roll back a state law – created when lawmakers took up transportation funding in 2009 – that requires cities to seek voter approval before passing local fuel taxes. It would also allow every county in Oregon to implement or hike vehicle registration fees without a vote, an option currently only available to the four counties with more than 350,000 residents.

“Every year, cities and counties get poorer and poorer and their infrastructure gets older and older,” said **Rep. Mark Gamba**, a Democratic sponsor of the bill and the former mayor of Milwaukie. **Gamba** said voters too often act like “petulant children” standing in the way of taxes that are necessary to replace vital infrastructure like roads, sewage plants and libraries.

Former Governor Brown championed a transportation package for \$5.3 billion in 2017 in additional taxes spread over 10 years. This funding was intended to address congestion, public transportation, road repairs, and bridge maintenance among other transportation needs.

Now here we are again with ODOT claiming they are broke needing \$3.5 billion to cover counties and cities, even though the 2017 10- year package is still supposed to be funding transportation needs. Where has the \$5.3 billion gone?

Leader Bonham said, “Fresh off the campaign trail, one thing was clear—Oregonians, regardless of party, are struggling with the rising cost of living. Instead of addressing these concerns, Democrat lawmakers are signaling their intent to raise taxes, proving just how out of touch they are with working families. Oregonians shouldn’t be ridiculed for rejecting tax hikes—especially when the real problem is Democrats’ failure to run government efficiently.”

Oregon’s state budget has more than doubled in the past 10 years, yet we face a cost of living 31% higher than the national average, the worst housing shortage of all 50 states, failing schools, and a homelessness and addiction crisis on our streets.

“Democrats may have a supermajority, but if [their plan](#) is to dismiss voters and push through tax hikes, we will oppose them every step of the way,” concluded **Bonham**.

Senate Republican leader pitches increased state scrutiny of Oregon Food Bank

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway

For years, legislative Republicans have argued that the Oregon Food Bank strayed from its mission of eliminating hunger by weighing in on political debates. On Tuesday, the top Republican in the Oregon Senate made his case for increased legislative scrutiny of the food bank and other nonprofit organizations that receive state funding.

Sen. Daniel Bonham’s [Senate Bill 644](#), which would create a legislative committee to audit the food bank, had a skeptical reception in the Senate Human Services Committee. Democrats who make up the majority on that committee and in the Legislature questioned the need for that bill, as the food bank already publishes annual financial audits and it would cost the state to conduct the audit.

Bonham’s proposal reflects growing tensions between the food bank and Republicans, most of whom [voted against](#) sending \$7.5 million to the food bank in 2023 when the federal government ended its pandemic-era temporary increase to food benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Republicans objected to a food bank statement opposing the war in Gaza and support for hot-button bills on agricultural overtime and climate change. And most personally for Bonham, the food bank

strongly opposed recent legislative walkouts — including one in 2023 that led to Bonham and other Republicans being barred from running for reelection.

As the food bank laid out in its blog in [2019](#), [2020](#) and [2023](#), those walkouts delayed or outright blocked the Legislature from passing bills or approving spending. But Republicans have argued that the food bank went too far.

"I think what flagged this for me was seeing my face on the back of a full-page Sunday Oregonian ad, that I know cost \$17,000, sponsored by the Oregon Food Bank," Bonham said. "And I thought, 'Wow, our tax dollars hard at work telling Republicans to get back to work on a bill that, quite frankly, would have raised the cost of living for every Oregonian by \$1,200.' How does that align with this core mission that they put forward?"

[State Republican leader seeks Oregon Food Bank audit over political activity](#)

Statesman Journal | By Dianne Lugo

Some Oregon Republicans believe the Oregon Food Bank is too involved in political activity and want to create a new audit committee to review the organization's financial activity, but opponents say the bill unfairly targets a single nonprofit and could result in lawsuits.

Senate Republican Leader Daniel Bonham from The Dalles and **Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis**, R-Albany, testified Tuesday in favor of their [Senate Bill 644](#), which would create a joint committee to perform an audit of the Oregon Food Bank's financial transactions between Dec. 1, 2021, and Jan. 1, 2025.

The committee also would provide a written report to the Legislature identifying and reporting on all financial transactions related to political activities by the nonprofit.

Boshart Davis and Bonham introduced a similar bill in 2023, but it did not receive a public hearing and died in committee.

Boshart Davis previously raised concerns about spending taxpayer money on what she called "partisan activities" of the Oregon Food Bank's operations. And in 2023 she opposed a \$7.5 million funding allocation to the organization.

On Tuesday, she and Bonham questioned the organization's support of [farmworker overtime in 2022](#), their admonishment of Oregon Republicans during the [historic legislative walkout](#) and a statement last year calling for a [ceasefire of violence against Palestinians](#).

"The Oregon Food Bank has strayed significantly from its original intent of the Oregon Food Share," Bonham said. "The Oregon Food Bank's involvement in political and social issues has led to a loss of trust and support."

Chung said the bill also singles out the Oregon Food Bank and would set a "chilling precedent" to permit Oregon to single out a private organization in this way.

"The Oregon Legislature should lead in good democracy and reject political witch hunts by elected officials," Chung said.

Members of the committee including Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, and Sen. Lisa Reynolds, D-Portland, indicated that they would not support the bill at this point and no further action has been scheduled. In a two-page letter to the committee after the hearing, Bonham said he "strongly refute[d]" the presented testimony and said the bill represented "accountability."

"We are not advocating for a witch hunt but for responsible governance that ensures nonprofits are not just charitable in name but in deed as well," Bonham wrote to the Senate Committee on Human Services and Chair Sara Gelser Blouin, D-Corvallis.

[Dramatic Increases in School Spending Have Not Improved Outcomes for Oregon Students](#)

Willamette Week | By Joanna Hou

Students in Oregon saw their reading and math scores decline over a decade when the state's spending on schools rose by 80%, an analysis by Georgetown University shows.

The data, presented to the state Legislature's Joint Ways and Means subcommittee on education Jan. 28, showed that increased spending from 2013 to 2023 correlated with lower student performance on the

Oregon Statewide Assessment. The increase in spending, education finance researchers concluded, did not correlate with improvements in performance for any student group.

[Federal officials shut down Oregon agency funding over 'concerns' with Smith pay](#)

Malheur Enterprise | By Les Zaitz

The federal government has suspended funding for an agency headed by state Rep. Greg Smith over his questionable pay claims that put thousands of dollars in his pocket while he was serving as a legislator. The development is the latest controversy engulfing Smith in his executive role at an obscure public agency, the Columbia Development Authority, or CDA.

[DAs to lawmakers: Accused child rapist, killers, drug traffickers released from jail as cases stall with no public defenders](#)

The Oregonian | By Aimee Green

An Oregon man accused of repeatedly molesting and raping a child has been out of jail for more than 1 ½ years, his case unable to go forward. He faces at least 25 years in prison if found guilty, but first, he must be assigned a public defender — and a chronic shortage means neither the court nor the state has come up with one.

The same goes for two dozen other Oregon defendants accused of working together to sell a massive cache of drugs that included nine pounds of fentanyl, enough for 144,000 deadly doses. More than a year after those people were arrested and charged, the system still hasn't been able to find public defenders for 10 of them and their case files gather dust.

Amanda Dalton, a lobbyist for the Oregon District Attorneys Association, told a subcommittee of state lawmakers Monday about these cases and others, stressing that prosecutors across the state are continuing their "urgent call for help" to address a public defender shortage that continues to careen out of control.

The district attorneys' plea came as the state's top court administrator, Nancy Cozine, told the lawmakers the shortage has reached unseen heights: While the number of criminal defendants held in jail without lawyers dropped by about half since mid-2023, to about 150 this week, the number of out-of-custody criminal defendants without lawyers has grown by more than 1,500, to about 3,500 this week.

"The bottomline is that the crisis has reached an all-time high," Cozine said.

The dire situation comes 18 months after many Oregonians believed the problem had been fixed. The Oregon Legislature [passed a more than \\$90 million plan designed to secure more defense lawyers](#). That day, [House leaders announced](#) that they'd "fulfilled their commitment to addressing the state's public defender shortage."

But [Rep. Paul Evans](#), D-Monmouth, told The Oregonian/OregonLive that state officials set out at a sluggish pace to create special state "strike teams" of expert defense lawyers who could step in to help cases like that of the accused child rapist proceed. Evans said he stands by the \$90 million plan but faults leaders of the Oregon Public Defense Commission for failing to use all the tools the Legislature gave them.

[Fertilizer reporting bill divides Oregon's farmers, rural residents](#)

Statesman Journal | By Tracy Loew

Large farms would have to report their fertilizer use under a bill being considered by the Oregon Legislature.

The goal, the bill's backers say, is to avoid situations like the one in the Boardman area, where decades of fertilizer over-application and runoff have contributed to a [drinking water crisis](#).

[Hundreds rally in Salem, Portland against Trump, Musk moves on funding, against agencies](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway, Alex Baumhardt

The rallies drew people from across Oregon who are worried about federal funding, Trump's budget nominee and a slew of other actions in recent days.

['We're following the president from the top': Deschutes County commissioners vote 2-1 to scrap DEIA committee](#)

KTVZ | By Barney Lerten

Deschutes County commissioners voted 2-1 Wednesday to terminate the county's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access Committee, with the majority saying they are following the Trump administration's direction and that the county already works to accomplish those goals.

[Oregon coast county mulls aiding ICE arrests, but rejects it, fearing repercussions from Salem](#)

The Oregonian | By Zane Sparling

Coos County commissioners nixed a proposal to welcome federal immigration officials into their jails after hearing that the idea could place the county in legal jeopardy.

The proclamation, though technically nonbinding, would have offered full throated support for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the federal agency known as ICE.

On Tuesday, Coos County Sheriff Gabe Fabrizio and District Attorney Jody Newby told the county board that violating the state's "Sanctuary Promise" laws would put them at risk for loss of state funding and lawsuits, which wouldn't be covered by the county's insurance.

['This is a first': Local pastor claims he was denied entry to Portland ICE facility for routine check-in](#)

KOIN 6 | By Ariel Iacobazzi

The Reverend Dr. Mark Knutson is sharing his concerns after he said he was denied entry to a U.S. Immigrant and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Portland during what was supposed to be a routine check-in.

Knutson is the pastor of Portland's Augustana Lutheran Church and chair of [Lift Every Voice Oregon](#). For multiple decades, his congregation has served as a sanctuary for immigrants.

[Oregon Medicaid recipients face massive delays with new rent assistance benefit](#)

KPTV | By Adrian Thomas

A new Medicaid housing assistance program in Oregon is struggling with delays, leaving some recipients at risk of eviction.

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) launched the benefit in November to help Oregon Health Plan (OHP) members cover rent, but slow processing times have left some in limbo.

[Central Oregon leaders respond as Trump's deportation promises take shape](#)

OPB | By Kathryn Styer Martinez

Now that the second Trump administration has begun, the president's promised expulsion of unauthorized immigrants is beginning to materialize. In Bend, community organizations, immigration attorneys and city officials are figuring out how to help people know their rights if they're approached by federal immigration agents.

In a written statement Monday, Bend Mayor Melanie Kebler addressed the fears and uncertainty brought on by what she called "rapid-fire changes to immigration policy." She reiterated that Bend officials would adhere to Oregon's Sanctuary Promise Act.

[Local sheriff's offices confirm they won't join ICE raids](#)

East Oregonian | By Yasser Marte

As the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents roundup undocumented immigrants nationwide, the Umatilla and Morrow county sheriff's offices made it clear they will not join any ICE raids.

Doing so would be against Oregon law.

"That's the rules in Oregon that we've been following for years so that's what I'm gonna continue to do," Morrow County Sheriff John Bowels said.

Capt. Sterrin Ward with the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office also said it will not assist ICE on rounding up people.

[Rumored ICE operations in East Multnomah County remain unverified](#)

The Outlook / By Christopher Keizur

The cities of Gresham and Wood Village, as well as the East County legislative delegation, released a joint statement on misinformation that has been swirling around concerns of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The municipalities, represented by Mayors Travis Stovall and Jairo Rios-Campos, as well as Rep. Ricki Ruiz, D-Gresham, Rep. Zach Hudson, D-Troutdale, and Sen. Chris Gorsek, D-Gresham, said there is “no confirmed information to support” unverified reports on immigration enforcement actions taking place locally.

"Nobody elected Elon": Bynum, Wyden, Merkley join rally against Musk

KATU

At a rally outside of the Treasury building titled "Nobody Elected Elon," senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), and Oregon Rep. Janelle Bynum (D-5) gave a speech, among various other Democrat politicians.

On Tuesday, Feb. 4, a rally believed to have been organized by national grassroots organization Indivisible, was livestreamed on YouTube with the title "Nobody Elected Elon."

Locally grown, globally sold: Tariff threats highlight reach of Oregon agriculture

OPB / By Alejandro Figueroa

President Donald Trump's plan to impose sweeping tariffs on goods coming to the U.S. from Canada and Mexico may have taken a back seat, for now, after last-minute [negotiations on Monday](#). But, in Oregon a possible trade war still means uncertainty for farmers dependent on overseas buyers.

In 2023, Oregon industries like agriculture and semiconductor manufacturers exported more than [\\$25 billion worth of goods](#) to overseas markets. Oregon farmers sell more than \$2 billion in agricultural goods like wheat, hazelnuts, fruits and vegetables and ornamental plants from nurseries to the global market.

EDUCATION

A new database to look up K-5 schools' reading curriculum is live in Oregon, but advocates say key info is missing

The Oregonian / By Julia Silverman

The Oregon Department of Education has quietly unveiled [a new tool](#) to allow parents and other community members to look up which [early literacy curriculum](#) any of the state's school districts use.

Portland Public Schools budget proposal cuts 200 positions, including 90 teachers

KATU / By Tanvi Varma

Portland Public Schools [may be cutting staff](#), including 23 central office positions, 90 teachers, and more than 100 support staff members.

As for teaching positions that may be on the chopping block, it's certain educational assistants and staff members, who are no longer needed due to enrollment decline, and dual language immersion supplemental staff.

Dr. Kimberlee Armstrong, the district superintendent, laid out the reasons behind the cuts, which include inflation, limited state funding, and declining enrollment.

HOMELESSNESS

Bend Police community survey finds more than 1 in 5 feel less safe than a year ago; homelessness still key issue

KTVZ / By Barney Lerten

A sizable majority of Bend residents say they still trust Bend Police, though more than 1 in 5 survey respondents said they feel less safe than they did a year ago, according to a report on the results released Tuesday.

Longtime Portland shelter providers have questions about Mayor Keith Wilson's shelter plan

OPB / By Alex Zielionski

The businessman-turned-politician's \$28 million plan to dramatically increase night-only shelters will depend on buy-in from many long-standing homeless service providers.

[Church in the Park opens transitional shelter for families in Dallas](#)

Statesman Journal | By Bill Poehler

It took longer than they planned, but the first residents of a transitional shelter for families in Dallas were expected to move into the home Wednesday.

The transitional shelter in rural Polk County was proposed in 2023 by Church at the Park — a Salem-based nonprofit that helps people who are homeless find shelter and other services.

HOUSING

[How Portland's middle housing initiative is faring](#)

OPB | By Gemma DiCarlo

The city of Portland [changed its zoning rules](#) in 2020 with the goal of producing duplexes, [cottage clusters](#) and other multi-unit housing in areas traditionally zoned for single-family homes. The idea was to provide more options at more affordable price points for the city's growing population. A [new report](#) shows the initiative is largely working. It says more middle housing units are now being built than single-family homes, and those units are selling for \$250,000 to \$300,000 less than a new, market-rate detached house.

HEALTH CARE

[Former OHSU President Danny Jacobs Remains "Special Adviser" to Interim Leader](#)

Willamette Week | By Anthony Effinger

Dr. Danny Jacobs, the former president of Oregon Health & Science University who resigned abruptly in October after a rocky tenure, remains a "special adviser" to interim president Steve Stadum, according to an internal email obtained by *WW*.

WILDFIRE

[To Understand the Damage in the Santiam Canyon, Hear From Those Who Narrowly Escaped](#)

Willamette Week | By Jeff Manning

During more than five months of reporting, the Oregon Journalism Project spoke with many survivors of the Santiam Canyon fires of 2020, in addition to Kathleen Becherer.

Here are two of their stories:

[PacifiCorp Was Grossly Negligent in Oregon's 2020 Wildfires. Now It's Asking Lawmakers for Protection.](#)

Willamette Week | By Jeff Manning

State Rep. John Lively (D-Springfield), who chairs the House Climate, Energy and Environment Committee, says lawmakers are serious about tackling the causes and impacts of wildfires.

"These are huge issues," Lively says. "It's clear we can't continue operating the way we've been operating."

Fred Heutte, senior policy adviser at the NW Energy Coalition, a green energy advocacy group, says, "There's a lot of money and a lot of risk on the line."

It's a volatile issue that transcends typical partisan lines. Cate, the Lebanon representative, and two other House Republicans are sponsoring a bill "that would prohibit any rate hikes for any utility provider if it has unresolved wildfire liability lawsuits for more than three years." (PacifiCorp recently raised its residential rates by 8.6%, according to the PUC.)

Senate Minority Leader Daniel Bonham (R-The Dalles) says in his experience that investor-owned utilities like PacifiCorp "keep loading costs on ratepayers, many of whom can't afford it. Ratepayers are getting left in the dust."

Some Democrats, including Sen. Khanh Pham of Portland and Rep. Mark Gamba of Milwaukie, want the PUC to change the way utilities get compensated. Instead of being granted a nearly guaranteed return

on investment (the reason a savvy investor bought PacifiCorp), lawmakers want utilities to have to meet rigorous performance standards to get paid.

State Rep. Ed Diehl (R-Scio), a staunch conservative, finds himself in agreement with liberal Democrats on the need to push PacifiCorp to treat ratepayers—and the victims of the 2020 fires—better.

“They are dragging their feet,” Diehl says. “I want to see them do the right thing.”

And where is Gov. Tina Kotek? She is not yet saying what her position is.