

## **Oregon News**

### **POLITICS**

#### **[Gov. Tina Kotek affirms commitment to controversial executive order as opponents scramble to push back](#)**

*Oregon Live / By Carlos Fuentes*

Gov. Tina Kotek has affirmed her commitment to her union-friendly [executive order](#) that sparked widespread opposition from construction trade groups and Republican lawmakers.

Proponents of the order, including unions, argue that mandating so-called project labor agreements helps maintain a high standard of quality work conditions and adequate wages and leads to lower construction costs and timelines. But opponents question those assertions and wonder how limiting competition among construction firms is good for taxpayers.

Opponents, meanwhile, argue that the governor overstepped her authority and say the mandate will disproportionately hurt small and rural contractors and lead to higher costs and delayed construction timelines.

In mega projects, such as the Interstate Bridge replacement project, project labor agreements can help streamline organization and enforcement by setting the same labor and workplace standards for all contractors and subcontractors, regardless of union status. Leaders of the bridge replacement project said they had already planned to use a labor agreement prior to Kotek's executive order.

Studies of project labor agreements have shown mixed results regarding their effects on construction costs and timelines. Kotek's office has not publicly released any state analyses that support her claims that the executive order will shorten construction timelines.

**Senate Republican Leader Daniel Bonham**, in a scathing Dec. 20 press release, called Kotek's executive order an "unconstitutional power grab and an insult to Oregon's contractors," claiming that the Democrat-controlled Legislature, not Kotek, should decide such policies.

#### **[Kotek's executive order for state funded infrastructure projects](#)**

*The News-Review / By Drew Winkelmaier*

The mandate requires collective bargaining to be executed with "state-funded projects where onsite labor costs constitute 15% or more of the total construction, reconstruction, or major renovation costs," according to Kotek's press release on the mandate.

However, this order only applies to new projects. No projects currently underway will undergo collective bargaining. The order further exempts "short in duration" projects or projects that are complex in nature making a PLA unproductive.

According to the Oregon Journalism Project, which obtained an Oregon Department of Transportation report on PLAs throughout the country, fewer bids being made over projects will only increase costs. Based on ODOT's findings, costs could increase approximately 10% to 20% more expensive.

#### **[Lawmaker Proposes State Funding for Ailing Coos Bay Hospital](#)**

*Willamette Week / By Nigel Jaquiss*

**Sen. David Brock Smith (R-Port Orford)** [introduced a bill](#) today that would appropriate state funding for Bay Area Hospital in Coos Bay.

Bay Area lies just outside Brock Smith's district, but his constituents rely on the hospital, which is both the largest medical center on the Oregon Coast and the region's largest employer.

Senate Bill 1000 would appropriate \$10 million to Bay Area Hospital, which posted losses of more than five times that amount from 2022 to 2024 and has announced plans to enter into a 10-year management contract and facility lease with Quorum Health, a Tennessee private equity firm.

Brock Smith says his efforts to help the hospital predate UFCW's efforts and he's not working with the union.

"Bay Area Hospital and its services are critical to the South Coast and my constituents," Brock Smith says.

"I have been engaged with their board chair and CEO for over two years and have drafted previous

legislation, [HB 2952](#), in the 2023 legislative session to attempt to assist with some of the issues facing Bay Area and a number of rural hospitals.”

He’s skeptical of UFCW’s plan, which calls for a mixture of state funding and local tax dollars (Bay Area is owned by a local hospital district that has the authority to levy property taxes but does not currently).

“I have not been approached nor have I spoken to UFCW,” Brock Smith says. “I feel it is completely disingenuous of the UFCW to come in at the 11th hour, having no discussion with the board who has been duly elected by the residents of the district and have been working on this critical issue for years.” Although Brock Smith isn’t working with the union, his bill doesn’t preclude any effort to help the hospital: The text of the measure says the \$10 million would be “in addition to and not in lieu of any other appropriation.”

### [Should striking workers be able to collect unemployment? Sparks fly in Salem](#)

*Oregon Live | By Sami Edge*

A proposal to allow [striking workers](#) to collect unemployment benefits is pitting workers and unions against business interests in Salem.

The Senate Committee on Labor and Business on Thursday heard public testimony on [Senate Bill 916](#), sponsored by a host of Democrats in both chambers, including influential party and committee leaders.

Republicans questioned whether small businesses would have to bear the brunt of paying for unemployment for employees of large corporations that go on strike.

Lindi Leahy, director of the state’s unemployment division, said the Oregon Employment Department estimates the bill would cost \$5.3 million from the state’s unemployment fund over the 2025-2027 biennium. That’s less than 1% of the annual payout, which was about \$1.5 billion in the last two calendar years, Leahy said.

**Sen. Cedric Hayden, R-Fall Creek**, questioned the department’s predictions and sought some guarantee that small businesses wouldn’t see tax rates jump if employees of larger corporations go on strike.

“If the employees that are involved with a strike all the sudden now have income – I’m just going to put on record now that I think that \$5 million is going to be significantly underestimated,” Hayden said.

### [Bill to offer unemployment pay to striking workers sets up clash in Salem](#)

*OPB | By Dirk VanderHardt*

Unions say that [Senate Bill 916](#) would extend a crucial lifeline to employees fighting for better working conditions. They argue that granting striking workers more stability will force employers to a fair agreement sooner.

Business groups and city governments, meanwhile, told the Senate Labor and Business Committee that the bill could bring negative consequences. They predicted more frequent and longer strikes if workers are able to access weekly payments that can [range from \\$196 to \\$836 a week](#).

But Republican lawmakers and business opponents questioned the reliability of those predictions.

“If the employees that are involved with the strike all of a sudden now have income, I’m just going to put on record now that I think that \$5 million is going to be significantly underestimated,” said state **Sen.**

**Cedric Hayden, R-Fall Creek**.

**Senate Minority Leader Daniel Bonham** questioned what the bill might mean for public agencies that are already facing tight budgets. He asked, for instance, how much Portland Public Schools would have had to pay out in unemployment benefits during a nearly monthlong teachers strike in 2023 if the bill were in effect. Leahy said she could not say.

### [Oregon House GOP calls for tax cuts, housing fix. But Democrats hold the cards](#)

*OPB | By Bryce Dole*

Republicans said the state needs to do more, spend less and adjust course from Democrat-led policies to address everything from rising grocery prices to the state’s housing shortage and mental health problems.

**Senate Minority Leader Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles**, has already proposed a bill that would require school districts to ensure that “every athletic competition or extracurricular sport is expressly designated by the biological sex of the students who participate in the competition or sport.”

#### [Oregon House Republicans slam status quo, share few specific fixes](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway*

During a 25-minute press conference, House Republican Leader Christine Drazan said she hears every day from Oregonians who are dissatisfied or frustrated with their government. Drazan, R-Canby, acknowledged that Republicans don’t have much power to pass their own bills or stop bills or tax hikes. Democrats hold 36 seats in the House and 18 in the Senate, the threshold needed to create new taxes or increase existing ones, and Gov. Tina Kotek is a Democrat.

“What we can do is be a voice for those Oregonians, and that’s what we’re doing today,” Drazan said.

“We are letting Oregonians know that we hear them and we see them, and we stand with them, and we will not be voting for bills that raise the cost of living.”

Rep. Emily McIntire, R-Eagle Point and the vice chair of the House Education Committee, introduced [House Bill 3217](#) to create the Empowerment Scholarship Program, similar to school vouchers in other states that let students take money that would go to their neighborhood public school and use it for private school tuition or other educational costs. **Senate Republican Leader Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles**, has a similar proposal in [Senate Bill 630](#) and [Senate Joint Resolution 24](#), which would amend the state constitution to establish a right to school choice.

Drazan, Boshart Davis and Bonham also sent multiple press releases on Wednesday about an issue that didn’t make their list of priorities: Blocking transgender girls from playing girls’ sports. President Donald Trump [signed](#) an executive order to that effect on Wednesday and Bonham was there for the signing.

Oregon Republicans in the House and Senate have already introduced at least three bills to require school sports be based on biological sex, not gender, and Drazan plans to file another bill on the topic.

#### [Capital Chatter: How to engage the Legislature - and how the Legislature should engage itself](#)

*Oregon Capital Insider | By Dick Hughes*

So, what are Oregonians to do if they disagree with the Democrats’ agenda? I’ve been asking that question even before the 2025 Legislature convened in January. It turns out that the advice – whether from Republicans, Democrats or middle-of-the-roaders – is to proceed the same as if there were no supermajorities: Get involved. Don’t wait on the sidelines.

At a briefing last month, Senate Republican Leader Daniel Bonham, of The Dalles, praised Wagner for walking into places where Democratic policies – and politicians – were unpopular. “He really has invested energy and effort to get around the state,” Bonham said. “Rob Wagner went statewide and said, ‘Let me meet your family. Let me meet your friends. Let’s sit down and have a meal. Let me listen to a podcast with your grandmother.’”

#### [U.S. Senate Democrats to remain on floor overnight denouncing Trump budget nominee](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Jennifer Shutt*

U.S. Senate Democrats plan to give a series of floor speeches overnight Wednesday to highlight their opposition to President Donald Trump’s nominee to lead the Office of Management and Budget.

The tactic will keep the chamber’s staff working all night, though it won’t delay a final confirmation vote from taking place on Thursday evening.

It also isn’t likely to sway at least four Republicans to vote against Russ Vought’s confirmation, the minimum number needed to reject a nominee in the chamber controlled by the GOP.

Budget Committee ranking member Jeff Merkley, an Oregon Democrat, kicked off the speeches in the middle of the afternoon, saying that Vought is “Donald Trump’s most dangerous nominee.”

“This man is incredibly dangerous to the foundations of our Republic — the system of laws and the checks and balances of our Constitution,” Merkley said. “And when you put into the Office of Management and Budget an individual who willfully avoids and rolls over the laws of the country and

says he will not abide by the separation of powers — that is a fundamental danger that all of us having taken an oath to the Constitution must stop.”

### [Hundreds of Oregonians join nationwide protests against the Trump administration](#)

*OPB | By Bryce Dole, Troy Brynson, Natalie Pate*

Hundreds of Oregonians gathered in Portland and Salem Wednesday to protest the Trump administration just over two weeks into the president’s second term.

The demonstrations came the same day that the Trump administration continued to issue orders in line with the vision articulated on the campaign trail.

### [US Rep. Val Hoyle exits DOGE caucus, says Elon Musk is ‘breaking the system’](#)

*OPB | By Jeff Thompson*

U.S. Rep. Val Hoyle (D-Ore) has announced she’s leaving the bipartisan [Department of Government Efficiency](#) House caucus.

### [DEI program in Bend dismantled amid Trump’s federal unwinding of diversity initiatives](#)

*Oregon Live | By Carlos Fuentes*

[Deschutes County](#) commissioners voted Wednesday to dismantle the county’s diversity, equity, inclusion and access committee created in 2023 to improve access to county services and foster a more inclusive environment for county employees.

The board’s move has proven polarizing, shown in more than 150 emails sent this week to commissioners and provided to the newsroom by the county. While some residents said they support dissolving the committee, others said they were concerned about the implications of the move.

### [Oregon congresswoman introduces 'Stop Musk Act' as state responds to federal chaos](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway*

New Oregon U.S. Rep. Maxine Dexter didn’t anticipate that the first bill she introduced in Congress would be to prohibit unelected billionaire Elon Musk from retaliating against federal employees.

## **HOUSING**

### [Proud Ground and PCEF Launch Affordable, Sustainable Townhomes Near University of Oregon-Portland Campus](#)

*Hoodline | By Samuel Hansen*

A fresh twist on housing has taken root in Northeast Portland, where a partnership between the local land trust Proud Ground and the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund (PCEF) has unveiled a row of modern townhomes that promise both affordability and sustainability.

Among the six homes, three are testaments to climate resilience, featuring net zero capabilities—this means they can generate as much energy as they use—thanks to solar panels and high-efficiency heating and cooling systems.

Spanning two- and three-bedroom designs, the homes are being sold to qualified, first-time homebuyers in Proud Ground's applicant pool, over 75% of whom are households of color. Amidst the backdrop of a city where traditional home prices are skyrocketing, these homes are pegged under \$300,000—a significant reduction thanks to the community land trust model and other subsidy programs.

## **HEALTH CARE**

### [Opinion: This year, policymakers must act to protect access to care](#)

*Portland Tribune | By Becky Hultberg*

This legislative session, our elected officials must act to protect access to health care in Oregon by supporting the governor's recommended budget. Without their action, we will face a compounding crisis — namely, OHP will not have enough funding to serve the one in three Oregonians on its rolls, and care will be at risk as hospitals are unable to weather unrelenting pressures including chronic underpayment from government health care programs like OHP.

### [Some Providence nurses express misgivings over tentative deal to end strike](#)

*Oregon Live | By Kristine de Leon*

Some striking Providence nurses appeared unwilling to accept the [tentative labor agreement](#) reached with the health system this week, raising the possibility that the largest health care strike in Oregon history could continue into a fifth week.

Several nurses told The Oregonian/OregonLive they plan to vote against the contract proposal, arguing it falls short in addressing systemic understaffing, patient safety and wage and benefit demands.

Beyond wages, some nurses object to the contract's approach to staffing levels and employee's health insurance plans.

## **EDUCATION**

### **[Portland Public Schools weighs canceling contract for Jefferson High School modernization](#)**

*Oregon Live | By Julia Silverman, Jonathan Bach*

Board members at Portland Public Schools are weighing a staff recommendation to sever ties with the prominent construction firm contracted to lead the modernization of [Jefferson High School](#), a historic anchor of the now-gentrified neighborhood that was once the heart of the city's Black community.

Given scheduling delays, cost overruns and other glitches at [Benson High](#) while Andersen oversaw that school's extensive renovation, "PPS has significant concerns about Andersen's performance ... including schedule management/timely completion, cost management, quality, and safety," district staff wrote in the memo, adding, "If rebidding the Jefferson project results in a new Construction Manager/General Contractor, PPS reasonably expects greater quality of project management and execution of the contract."

### **[State, local officials plan for potential immigration enforcement at schools](#)**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Shalina Chatlani*

As U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents fan out across the country to conduct high-profile migrant arrests that President Donald Trump has called for, local and state officials are developing their own directives to support — or possibly thwart — potential ICE visits to public schools.

In 2022, the most recent numbers available, there were about 850,000 children in the country illegally, [according to the Pew Research Center](#). [Long-standing federal policy](#) from the U.S. Department of Education — backed by the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) — says that all children, regardless of their or their parents' immigration status, are entitled to public elementary and secondary education.

Nevertheless, conservative states have signaled their willingness to cooperate with ICE.

Meanwhile, in Democratic-leaning states, officials are trying to remind school leaders of the limits of ICE's authority.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **[A new fight is coming over plastic bags](#)**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Nick Engelfried*

When Oregon banned retailers and restaurants from giving out plastic, single-use checkout bags in 2019, environmental groups hailed it as a big step forward in the fight against plastic waste.

Critics include environmental groups who strongly support reducing plastic waste, but say the bans have failed to achieve their full, intended effect because of loopholes that allow businesses to offer thicker "reusable" plastic bags at checkout.

Because thicker bags contain more plastic, switching over to them actually increases plastic waste if too many consumers simply treat them as disposable. Charging customers for checkout bags was supposed to encourage their reuse, but fees as low as five cents per bag appear to be too small to have had the hoped-for level of impact on shopper behavior.

Oregon [Senate Bill 551](#), sponsored by Democrat Janeen Sollman of Hillsboro, would phase out all plastic checkout bags while also restricting the use of other single-use plastic items, such as toiletries offered in hotels.

Large irrigated farmland owners said they fear steep penalties — up to \$10,000, according to the bill — for failing to provide the data or for being found by the state to be overapplying fertilizer. They testified

in person and via video, largely expressing concerns that state agencies lack the expertise to understand the rate that fertilizer is absorbed by the hundreds of crops in the state, which are grown in varying soil types. They said it would be expensive and ineffective for agencies to try to track the data and determine problem areas.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **[OpenAI visits Oregon in search of sites to build its Trump-backed Stargate AI data centers](#)**

*OPB | By Matt O'Brien*

OpenAI is scouring the U.S. for sites to build a network of huge data centers to power its artificial intelligence technology, expanding beyond a flagship Texas location and looking across 16 states to accelerate the Stargate project championed by President Donald Trump.

The maker of ChatGPT put out a request for proposals for land, electricity, engineers and architects and began visiting locations in Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin this week.

The partnership said it is investing \$100 billion — and eventually up to \$500 billion — to build large-scale data centers and the energy generation needed to further AI development. Trump called the project a “resounding declaration of confidence in America’s potential” under his new administration, though the first project in Abilene, Texas, has been under construction for months.

OpenAI’s proposal makes no mention of whether it intends to prioritize renewable energy sources such as wind or solar to power the data centers, but it says electricity providers should have a plan to manage carbon emissions and water usage.