

## **Oregon News**

### **POLITICS**

#### **Oath takers: Oregon legislators to be sworn in**

*KOIN 6 | By Tim Steele*

Monday is a busy day at the Oregon State Capitol.

The lawmakers for the 83rd Oregon Legislative Assembly will be sworn in, then will elect leaders for each chamber and introduce bills for the upcoming session, which [begins January 21](#).

The Oregon House will convene at 8:30 a.m. with the Senate following an hour later. Then at 1 p.m. the new legislature will meet in the House chamber for a joint session at what is expected to be Gov. Tina Kotek's State of the State speech.

#### **Housing, education, foster care among Mid-Valley lawmakers' 2025 legislative priorities**

*Statesman Journal | By Dianne Lugo*

Oregon lawmakers return to the Capitol on Jan. 13 for organizational days to swear in members-elect, formally introduce bills and finalize committee assignments.

The 2025 session gets underway the following week, on Jan. 21, and must end on June 29.

Democratic leadership has said they intend to focus on a massive transportation bill to address budget issues at the Oregon Department of Transportation and resolve unfinished projects in the 2017 transportation package.

Gov. Tina Kotek released her [proposed budget](#) last month and said she will focus on the same goals she established during her first two years in office: housing and homelessness, behavioral health and education.

#### **Sen. Fred Girod focuses on wildfire**

Sen. Fred Girod, R-Silverton, said getting additional funding to fight wildfires is the only reason he ran for reelection.

"Fire just isn't a priority," Girod said. "Fire is down at the bottom at the barrel. We can't do that anymore."

His home on the North Santiam River near Mill City was destroyed in 2020 in the Beachie Creek Fire, which he described as the most traumatic thing he has experienced.

Girod moved to Silverton and represents Senate District 9, encompassing portions of Clackamas, Linn and Marion counties.

"I was planning on retiring but the fire issue is something that is paramount to me," he said. "Plus I owe it to the little city of Gates to try and help them so they can rebuild."

Girod said Oregon cannot continue using the same model of funding it has always used. He wants the state to add significant equipment, especially air power that he said will help stop wildfires early.

#### **Rep. Shelly Boshart-Davis to focus on housing affordability**

Housing affordability is Rep. Shelly Boshart-Davis, R-Albany, top priority going into the legislative session. She said her constituents are concerned about affordability and traffic from [House Bill 2001](#) that required middle housing — duplexes, townhomes and small multifamily units that serve middle-income earners.

The bill required cities with populations between 10,000 and 25,000 people to allow duplexes in single-family housing zones. It also required cities with populations greater or equal to 25,000 to permit the development of middle housing types in single-family zoning.

Boshart-Davis said she will introduce a "fix it" bill to allow cities to again deny middle housing if they need more infrastructure to address problems that ensued, specifically traffic issues, she said.

"It creates a grant fund to improve that infrastructure," Boshart-Davis said.

She also would be keeping an eye on what she called "unfunded mandates," new laws that do not include funding for implementation.

#### **Health care licensing, rollback of gender-affirming care top of mind for Rep. Ed Diehl**

Rep. Ed Diehl, R-Stayon, said he intends to reintroduce legislation creating licensure compacts for a half dozen professions so professionals licensed in those fields in another state would be able to work in Oregon.

A previous bill enacting a Nurse Licensure Compact in Oregon died in committee during the 2023 legislative session. According to nurse.org, Oregon is one of 10 states without legislation for the Enhanced Nursing Licensure Compact.

Diehl said he also would introduce similar bills to create licensure compacts for social workers, professional counselors, physician assistants and dentists.

"I feel strongly that we need to do something to increase the workforce in health care and something that continues to come up is the ability to have licenses that are portable from state to state," Diehl said. "We know for a fact that we're losing [out on] qualified professionals," he added.

He said he'll be calling for transparency and accountability from Oregon lawmakers and state agencies throughout the session.

"Every dollar that we're spending we should be seeing some results," Diehl said.

Diehl opposed [House Bill 2002](#) in 2023 which addressed gender-affirming care and abortion rights, and said he would introduce a bill requiring the [Health Evidence Review Commission](#) to go through an "evidence-based process" to determine coverage for gender-affirming care.

"I know that's going to be very controversial for some people in the building, but it shouldn't be, really," he said.

#### **Rep. Kevin Mannix to take 'collegial approach' around housing**

Rep. Kevin Mannix, R-Salem, said his top priority for the upcoming session will be expanding available housing for first-time homebuyers and renters.

"I will be pressing forward with legislation which will dramatically change the availability of land for housing by having the state empower counties to designate housing opportunity areas which urban growth boundaries or other restrictions will not necessarily restrain," Mannix said.

Mannix also said he would be taking a "collegial approach" to pass legislation in 2025 and that he would be emphasizing the "repurposing" of existing tax revenues rather than increasing taxes.

"I will be emphasizing a combination of passion and energy about getting things done with a capacity to reflect on the accomplishments we have done in Oregon," he added. "We sometimes overlook the beautiful things about this state because we are focused on the challenges facing us."

#### **Sen. Kim Thatcher to focus on safety, schools**

Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, said her top three priorities this year will be trying to make living in Oregon more affordable, neighborhoods safer and schools better.

Thatcher said she also would focus on tackling homelessness and mental health issues.

"Too many proposals will run counter to these priorities," Thatcher said, adding she hoped the legislature does not "cater to partisan special interests."

Thatcher said she would champion "Kayleigh's Law," which went into effect in 2022 in Arizona. It allows for victims of dangerous crimes to request a permanent, lifetime restraining order against the person who harmed them.

"It will help alleviate the victim of the trauma of having to repeatedly go to court in order to renew the restraining order against the convicted offender who harmed them," Thatcher said.

The bill also would provide legal protections against retribution and harassment.

[\*\*Dispelling Misinformation: Oregon firefighters are not being turned away from California fires, officials say\*\*](#)

*KDVR | By Rocky Walker*

Fires in Southern California are ravaging communities, requiring the help from outside agencies, but misinformation has led many astray with what's really happening.

One of the main rumors to come out regarding this aid is that firefighters being sent from Oregon to aid in fighting the fires are being stopped, forced to pass smog and emissions tests and firefighters are being delayed or even turned away from providing support to those fighting the fires on the frontlines. The Oregon State Fire Marshal and CalFire confirm that this rumor is false.

What is true is that 370 Oregon firefighters with OSFM have been sent to aid in fighting the Southern California wildfires.

### [Oregon roads and bridges are old and damaged. Fixing them is an expensive task for lawmakers this year](#)

*OPB / By Bryce Dole*

Collapsing bridges and coastal landslide highlight a major task for lawmakers during the upcoming legislative session.

#### **Fixing roads isn't leaders' priority, says state representative**

Democrats have a supermajority in both legislative chambers, which means they can pass taxes on a party-line vote. Still, passing the transportation package could be a difficult political task, particularly as many Oregonians facing the rising cost of living might be opposed to the prospect of new taxes and fees. Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, R-Albany, who is vice chair on the transportation committee, says the problems facing Oregon's roads and budgets have been clear for years, but leaders haven't made fixing it a priority. Despite a surge in funds since House Bill 2017, she questions whether Oregonians haven't been getting their money's worth.

"We already pay too much," said Boshart Davis, who co-owns her family's trucking company, Boshart Trucking. "And even if you were to absolutely promise, 'Okay, we're going to raise your taxes, but we promise that we will make sure that we spend these wisely,' I don't think Oregonians believe that." She argued that Oregon truckers have faced "unfair" taxes and that ODOT shouldn't be budgeting \$135 million dollars — nearly 5% of the agency's budget needs in 2025 — for the state's on-road bicycle and pedestrian network.

"Budgets reflect priorities, and if the goal of our transportation infrastructure is to move people, goods and services, I believe that ODOT has moved away from that goal," she said. "I think Oregonians would be really surprised and probably disappointed in where their money went, and those are going to be decisions that are made from the top."

### [Treasurer Elizabeth Steiner: 'Oregon doing well financially'](#)

*KOIN 6 / By Ken Boddie*

A physician by trade and an adjunct professor at OHSU, Elizabeth Steiner has been in the Oregon legislature since 2012. She is the first woman to be state treasurer who said Oregon is "a very diverse state" that helps to provide the variety of perspectives necessary to run the government well.

"In most households, it's the women who run the family budget," she said, adding she ran her family's budget as well as the state budget as a member of the budget committee. "I have a perspective that many people don't. ... I think I bring a new perspective to serve Oregonians in a different way."

Steiner said the good news for Oregon is that "we're doing well financially. The challenge is ... on the budget side, expenses often outstrip the increases in revenue."

### [YVYV: Jim Moore on changes in D.C. and Oregon, and we celebrate Jim's retirement](#)

*KATU*

January is a month of beginnings. In this country, a dramatic shift in power begins this month as President-elect Donald Trump moves into the White House for a second time.

His inauguration takes place on January 20.

Here in Oregon, the state legislature begins its 2025 session on January 21 with a jam-packed agenda. It's a busy month with lots of changes.

KATU and this program's sponsor, Willamette University, invite you to watch this extensive one-on-one interview with Pacific University Professor and KATU Political Analyst Jim Moore.

## CRIME & PUBLIC SAFETY

### [Multnomah County public defenders push back against new DA's comments](#)

OPB | By Conrad Wilson

Defense attorneys expressed dismay over comments made by Multnomah County's new district attorney Nathan Vasquez, calling his remarks "offensive" and "inaccurate."

During an [interview with OPB published Monday](#), his first official day on the job, Vasquez offered a sharp critique of many of the county's public defenders.

"I call it the work stoppage," Vasquez said. "I hear it referred to as a defense attorney crisis. I don't accept that. I don't agree with that terminology. I see it much differently."

In the days since, many in the county's criminal defense bar have expressed concern and anger over Vasquez's remarks.

## BUSINESS & LABOR

### [Editorial: Merry Christmas, labor unions! Love, Gov. Kotek](#)

*The Oregonian Editorial Board*

In the week before Christmas, Gov. Tina Kotek delivered quite the gift to her labor union allies. Kotek issued a surprise [executive order](#) requiring contractors on major state-funded projects to collectively bargain with labor unions over wages, benefits and other conditions for their workers on these projects – even if their workers aren't unionized.

Unfortunately, Kotek's generosity comes at a cost for Oregonians. Such mandates for "project labor agreements" undermine the open and competitive process that state law and good governance call for. [Research](#) and experience show they also typically add costs for public projects, which already face increasing prices for materials. And the governor's poorly-worded order, made without input from contractors, has generated questions about whether the requirement applies to local affordable housing efforts, university projects and school renovations. Her office is now clarifying that it will only apply to projects owned by the state. With Oregon facing so many deep crises that need the governor's focused attention and pragmatic leadership, Kotek should listen to contractors' many legitimate criticisms, avoid the potential for drawn-out legal battles and reverse course on her sweeping order.

As written, the order calls for all state agencies awarding contracts or providing funds for significant construction projects to require project labor agreements – PLAs – between contractors and labor unions representing electricians, plumbers and other trades. Under such a requirement, contractors must commit to negotiating a comprehensive set of terms with labor unions in order to bid on the work. These agreements cover far more than wages, which already must meet state minimums for projects of a certain size. Rather, they can include provisions that contractors hire workers only through union-controlled processes, require union dues from workers and mandate contributions to the union's health and retirement plans – even if those workers, who are otherwise not union members, will likely never benefit from them. In fact, the [vast majority of contractors](#) and subcontractors are not unionized, with estimates of 75% or [more](#) being nonunion shops.

There are certainly instances in which contractors and labor unions have voluntarily set up project labor agreements, particularly for time-sensitive, complex projects. But there's been an ongoing battle over the state's attempts to force contractors to accept labor union participation in major transportation contracts – a legal dispute [currently under consideration by the Oregon Supreme Court](#). Kotek's order mandating PLAs for state projects in which labor accounts for at least 15% of the cost not only escalates that battle, but appears to go beyond what any other state has in place. Oregon once again is at the forefront of an economic experiment that shows little, if any, upside for the public.

Kotek contends that her executive order will provide more certainty and help control expenses because the project labor agreements will prohibit strikes and other costly work stoppages. However, her office could not point to a single such incident that shows this is a problem needing to be solved. Rather, when asked for an example, her office wrote that Kotek "was not looking backwards but ahead to several large

infrastructure projects that will need stable and sufficient skilled labor to complete. Broad adoption of PLAs across the enterprise will help build a pipeline of skilled workers in Oregon so that contractors do not need to pull in workers from out of state.” Kotek’s order also explicitly notes the labor agreements will help advance the goal of gender and racial equity in contracting by including specific targets. But the governor’s action ignores the work contractors are already doing to build the workforce and fails to consider the cost impacts. California Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed a bill last year that would have mandated project labor agreements for state projects of at least \$35 million, specifically calling out the [“significant fiscal implications.”](#)

Oregon has its own first-hand experience. The Oregon Department of Transportation issued a bid last September for companies interested in work on the Newberg-Dundee bypass and imposed a project labor agreement requirement. Only one firm submitted a bid, [which came in 22% above the agency’s projections](#), prompting the Oregon Transportation Commission to forward an additional \$5.9 million for that phase of the project. While some of the increase stemmed from higher materials costs, [ODOT also noted](#) higher employee costs for missing the estimate.

The governor’s office concedes that “the state’s inconsistent and infrequent use of PLAs in the past also lent itself to receiving fewer bids on projects where PLAs were required.” But the solution Kotek offers is baffling. Her office contends that “broad usage and acceptance of the tool will address this issue moving forward.”

So, increasing the cost of doing business on more projects will somehow result in a lot more bids and lower estimates? That’s some funky math.

Contractors – even those whom Kotek contends will benefit – aren’t buying it. Nate McCoy, president of the Oregon chapter of the National Association of Minority Contractors, said his organization strongly opposes the executive order. Many members are small firms unable to absorb the added administrative and operational costs that come with project labor agreements, he said. “We believe that creating opportunities for minority-owned businesses to thrive in an open and competitive environment, with equitable access to resources and support, is the best way to achieve racial equity,” he told the editorial board.

Similarly, Mike Salsgiver, executive director of Associated General Contractors’ Oregon-Columbia chapter, questioned what benefits Oregon will derive. “PLAs inflate project costs, meaning taxpayers will get less for their money, either through higher taxes or fewer completed projects,” he said in a statement. AGC, which is already involved in the case before the Oregon Supreme Court, is evaluating its options on how to respond to the order, he said.

But Kotek can end this by doing the sensible thing and rescinding her executive order. This is one gift she should take back.

#### [HP finalizes \\$53 million in CHIPS Act money for Oregon expansion](#)

*The Oregonian* / By Mike Rogoway

The Biden administration said Monday it has finalized a \$53 million award for HP Inc. to expand research and manufacturing in Corvallis.

The Commerce Department [announced the subsidy last summer](#) but other incentives have been downsized, renegotiated or dropped altogether as some chipmakers pulled back on their expansion plans amid declining sales. The Biden administration has been finalizing agreements at a rapid pace over the past few weeks, ahead of President-elect Donald Trump taking office.

#### [Here are Oregon’s fastest-growing jobs and what they pay](#)

*The Oregonian* / By Mike Rogoway

State economists expect Oregon will add 170,000 jobs over the next several years, bolstered by strong growth in the construction and health care industries.

The pace of job growth is slowing, though, as the state’s population ages, the post-pandemic labor boom recedes and as migration into Oregon settles into a slower pace. The Oregon Employment Department’s

latest forecast anticipates just 8% more jobs during the coming decade, down from prior 10-year forecasts that predicted employment would grow by as much as 13%.

## **HOUSING**

### **[Bend needs more housing, but for some it can't come fast enough](#)**

*OPB / By Kathryn Styer Martinez*

A recent state law gives the Central Oregon city a tool to expand its urban growth boundary. Not everyone is happy with the result.

## **HEALTH CARE**

### **[Providence says operations are smooth despite 5,000 striking at its hospitals, women's clinics](#)**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle / By Mike McNally*

The strike, the biggest such action ever in Oregon, drew criticism from Gov. Kotek.

## **ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**

### **[Oregon snowfall projected to drop 50% by 2100 among findings in latest state climate report](#)**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle / By Alex Baumhardt*

The Seventh Oregon Climate Assessment from state and federal scientists and researchers evaluates the what the future could look like based on increasingly precise forecasts.