

Oregon News

POLITICS

Transportation funding is on the agenda as the Legislative session gets started

Axios | By Kale Williams

The Oregon Department of Transportation says that without a fix, it could see layoffs resulting in deteriorating road conditions due to deferred maintenance, fewer snowplows in winter and slower service at the DMV.

The agency is facing [a \\$354 million deficit](#) for its next two-year budget, which starts July 1.

- Without an infusion of cash, the [agency said](#) it could be forced to cut up to 1,000 jobs and could potentially close 17 of the 88 maintenance stations statewide.

In her budget proposal, Gov. Tina Kotek recommended the Legislature [provide an additional \\$1.75 billion](#) for the upcoming biennium.

Oregon Legislature convenes; Senate President taps Sen. Mike McLane for 7 committees

Argus Observer

Today marks the start of the 83rd Oregon Legislative Assembly and one of Oregon's newest senators, Mike McLane...

HB 3103: Sets timber levels (so we don't burn like California)

Oregon Catalyst | Oregon Taxpayer Association

Oregon House Bill ([HB3103](#)) has been introduced that Directs the State Forester to establish sustainable harvest levels for harvesting timber on state forestland and develop a timber inventory model to inform sustainable harvest levels...

...The Bill Sponsors are State Representative Mark Owens (R), Cyrus Javadi (R), and State Senator Suzanne Weber (R).

OPINION: Trump needs to take on West Coast Democrats

Washington Examiner | Rep. Dwayne Yunker

In politics, they say timing is everything. Tuesday was President [Donald Trump's](#) first full day [back in office](#). But it was also the first full day in almost a year that [Oregon's](#) part-time legislature was back in session. The timing isn't a coincidence — it's a call to action. The incoming Trump administration is managing a lot of moving parts right now. Territorial expansion and sovereignty, immigration and border security, economic and energy policies, foreign policy and defense, and social policies such as education and healthcare. To be most effective, the Trump administration must move federal-state relations and state governance, especially in blue states, to the top of the playbook.

Provider taxes, staffing shortages and mental health will be top priorities for lawmakers in 2025

The Lund Report

Oregon legislative leaders said they will act early in the session to secure funding for the Oregon Health Plan, the state's version of Medicaid that currently covers 1.4 million Oregonians.

The Hospital Association of Oregon has expressed support for renewing it. Senate President Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, said during the press availability that the tax has had bipartisan support in the past and lawmakers need to approve it in order to access federal matching funds.

But Senate Minority Leader Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, pushed back, saying, "I don't believe in taxing health care as a blanket statement." He criticized Democrats for their openness to using their new

supermajority to pass taxes without Republican input. He also raised concerns about access to health care in rural areas.

"A lot of times, (people) have to drive (30 to 45 minutes), an hour plus to get to the nearest provider, nearest hospital," he said. "And our rural hospitals, right now, because of Medicaid reimbursement rates (and) because of Medicare reimbursement rates, are struggling to survive."

When asked if he supported raising rates, Bonham responded, "I think we need to have a very serious discussion."

[WLN Leadership Conference: Guy Benson, Steve Moore, Rep. Drazan](#)

Oregon Catalyst

Western Liberty Network (WLN) has announced its 15th Annual Leadership Conference. The Conference will be on February 1st starting at 9 a.m. and will feature Guy Benson, a Fox News Contributor, talk show host, and columnist; Steve Moore, former President Trump's senior economic Advisor and Fox News Contributor; Andrey Illarionov, a Cato Institute member; and Christine Drazan, Oregon House Minority Leader, as key speakers.

The conference also offers twenty training sessions led by some of Oregon's Elected officials, such as State Senator Kim Thatcher, State Representative Ed Diehl, and more.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

[A shortage of building inspectors threatens to upend Oregon's housing goals](#)

Salem Reporter

After almost two decades building homes in the Salem area, developer Oleg Foksha is seeing a problem crop up more often. Essential building inspections are lagging, delaying construction. Inspectors who work for local government and private utilities ensure buildings comply with state codes intended to make sure structures are safe and that people can get out quickly in case of fire. They typically review plans, inspect projects under construction and give developers notes on what needs to be fixed. But that process is slowed down when turnover means a different inspector who's unfamiliar with a project comes to a building site every time there's something new to inspect. In recent years, contractors find it harder to reach inspectors to clarify what needs to be corrected.

"The governor has a very ambitious mandate for housing statewide," said Al Rossi, deputy building inspector for the city of Salem. "We're critical to housing."

About 1,500 inspectors work statewide, and the state Employment Department estimates Oregon needs about 165 new inspectors each year to keep up with retirements and attrition, said Dan Carlson, an inspector for the city of Wilsonville who leads a training program at Chemeketa Community College. That is one of three programs training future inspectors in Oregon, alongside Portland Community College and one run by the state's Building Codes Division. Together, they produce about 50 graduates a year, far short of the need.

[Portland Mayor Keith Wilson pitches \\$28 million plan to end unsheltered homelessness](#)

OPB

Mayor Keith Wilson was elected in November with a pledge to end homeless camping on Portland's streets within one year. On Wednesday, he explained to regional leaders just how he wants to accomplish that goal.

[Oregon courts clear 47K residential eviction records](#)

KGW

Court officials emphasized that the 47,000 records sealed in December are just the beginning. An additional backlog of approximately 50,000 cases remains under review, with a goal of completing those by the end of 2025. Moving forward, state courts will automatically set aside eligible cases annually, creating a more streamlined process for record clearance.

[Oregon does need electrical components to open. They're competing with data centers](#)

The Oregonian

Apartment builder Walsh Construction has grappled with electrical equipment shortages for at least the last five years that have affected nearly all its projects, said Brian Ames, one of the company's project managers. The problem has forced developers to buy equipment before a project even starts to ensure it will finish on time.

[Limits on Oregon property taxes exacerbate Portland's budget mess](#)

Axios

The Portland City Council is looking for ways to address a massive budget shortfall, but one of the drivers of the deficit — declining [property taxes](#) — is an ongoing issue with no easy fix, some experts say. In a memo to city leaders last week, city administrator Michael Jordan [outlined areas](#) that could see potential cuts, including cuts to summer programs at parks, reductions in street paving projects, and layoffs of at least 120 city employees.

CRIME

[Even some Pacific Northwest defendants are unsure what Jan. 6 pardons will mean](#)

OPB

Dozens of far-right protesters burst into the state Capitol in Salem in an attempt to disrupt lawmakers' special session over COVID-19 restrictions. Days later, [some of those protesters](#) hopped on a flight to Washington D.C. to [participate in the now infamous riots](#) that delayed certification of the 2020 presidential election.

[New Oregon law clears thousands of past residential evictions from people's records](#)

KTVZ

Oregon's state courts cleared about 47,000 residential evictions from people's records in mid-December, as required by a 2023 law addressing housing and homelessness, according to the Oregon Judicial Department.

The state law, ORS 105.164 ([House Bill 2001, 2023](#)), requires courts to "set aside" and "seal" past residential evictions in cases that meet certain requirements. These evictions will no longer show up in background checks and, legally, the evictions never happened.

Court officials said the first batch of 47,000 records sealed in December was only the beginning. State court staff will continue reviewing a backlog of about 50,000 cases, with a goal of sealing those that are eligible by the end of 2025. Moving forward, the state courts automatically will set aside eligible cases annually.

IMMIGRATION

[Oregon immigration bill proposals: Sanctuary laws, immigration status](#)

Salem Statesman Journal

[Senate Bill 486](#), sponsored by Sen. David Brock Smith, R-Port Orford, would allow law enforcement to use public resources to assist in federal immigration enforcement and repeal other prohibitions in

current laws such as entering agreements for federal enforcement or sharing information about someone in custody.

[Senate Bill 11](#), sponsored by Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, would require police to ask about citizenship if an arrested person was in possession of a gun, which is prohibited under sanctuary laws. The proposed law also would require the arresting officer to notify federal immigration authorities if the individual was not a U.S. citizen.

Thatcher said she introduced the bill to address a "public safety issue." When asked, she did not provide specific cases or situations.

She told the Statesman Journal that being a sanctuary state "invites issues' with undocumented immigrants "in possession of firearms when they are arrested for another crime."

[Senate Bill 491](#), sponsored by Brock Smith, would require an arresting officer to notify federal immigration authorities if a person was arrested for delivery or manufacture of a controlled substance.

[**A federal judge temporarily blocks Trump's executive order ending birthright citizenship**](#)

AP

A federal judge on Thursday temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's executive order [ending the constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship](#) regardless of the parents' immigration status.

U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour ruled in the case brought by the states of Washington, Arizona, Illinois and Oregon, which argue the 14th Amendment and Supreme Court case law have cemented birthright citizenship.

[**Oregon officials on federal memo to comply with immigration policy**](#)

KPTV

On Wednesday, the U.S. Department of Justice sent federal prosecutors a memo to investigate state and local officials who interfere with the enforcement of President Trump's new immigration laws. Oregon Attorney General Dan Rayfield called this a politicization of the DOJ.

[**How Oregon is responding to Trump's crackdown on immigration**](#)

OPB

Local and state officials around the country could also be investigated and prosecuted by the Justice Department for refusing to cooperate with immigration enforcement. But Oregon [has a longstanding law](#) that specifically prohibits officials from doing just that. Oregon's new attorney general, Dan Rayfield, joins us to talk about all this and more.

[**Congress sends Laken Riley Act to Trump's desk as first bill of GOP's Washington takeover**](#)

Fox News

The original bill would direct Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers to detain illegal immigrants accused of theft-related crimes. It also would allow states to sue the Department of Homeland Security for harm caused to their citizens because of illegal immigration...

...The bill is named after a nursing student who was killed by an illegal immigrant while jogging on the University of Georgia's campus. Jose Ibarra, who was sentenced to life in prison for Laken Riley's murder, had previously been arrested but was never detained by ICE.

HEALTHCARE

[**Oregon hospitals seeks more funding to close reimbursement gap**](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle

Oregon hospitals are operating at a loss or often with thin profit margins, with patients boarding in emergency rooms and rural facilities forced to consider closing maternity wards. The space between net patient revenues and operating costs continues to rise, putting more than half of Oregon's hospitals in the red, hospital officials said in a Wednesday press conference.

EDUCATION

[Oregon Department of Education releases new way to track student performance](#)

KGW

ODE data shows less than 40% of third graders are reaching achievement standards in math statewide. Oregon numbers were poor pre-pandemic as well, when 46% of third graders met standards in 2019. Middle school students struggled in some subjects as well. For eighth graders, just 26% of kids reached math standards in 2023-24. Struggles continued in other subjects as well. Among third graders, less than 40% reached standards in English.

[Portland Public Schools starts plans to cut \\$40 million for next school year](#)

OPB

"Due to rising costs, limited funding and declining enrollment, we are facing \$40 million in reductions," PPS Superintendent Kimberlee Armstrong told reporters at a press conference on Wednesday. Officials gathered to share their first draft of proposed cuts for the 2025-26 school year.

[Senate Committee on Education discusses funding for programs & higher education](#)

KVAL

Ben Cannon, Executive Director of Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission, shared data showing Oregon's public funding per student is 24% below the national average. "I think some really compelling data around for every additional \$1,000 that a state invests per student the way that increases the likelihood of students earning degrees as well as decreasing debt associated with students in that state," said Cannon.

NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

[Act would pause new PERS investments in private fossil fuel funds for five years](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle

The "Pause Act" would put a five-year moratorium on new private equity investments made with Public Employee Retirement System, or PERS, funds, if more than 10% of the private equity fund is invested in fossil fuel companies or heavy users. It's meant to move the state's \$100 billion PERS investments away from risky fossil fuel investments that are linked to global climate change, according to chief sponsors Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, and Sen. Khanh Pham, D-Portland. Golden and Pham have [both backed](#) recent legislation to move the Treasury away from fossil fuel investments, including the [COAL ACT](#) passed in 2023, which directs the Treasury to divest its holdings in publicly traded companies that derive 20% or more of their revenue from coal production.

[A new forest project, including logging, is coming to Hells Canyon in Wallowa County](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle

The forest management plan takes in a pair of remote mounds (Morgan Butte and Nesbit Butte) 20 miles southeast of Joseph, in northeastern Oregon's Wallowa County, home to the treasured Eagle Cap Wilderness and Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. The management project initiated by the U.S.

Forest Service in 2020 across an 86,500-acre area targets a vast expanse of rugged canyonlands, river valleys and forested peaks in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.