

## **Oregon News**

### **POLITICS**

#### **Fear, confusion in Woodburn as Trump takes office**

*OPB | By Alejandro Figueroa*

Early on in the first Trump administration, people in Woodburn described heightened attention from immigration enforcement.

In 2017, one month after Trump took office, two buses of farmworkers heading to harvest flowers [were stopped near Woodburn](#) as part of “a targeted enforcement operation”.

[Eleven people were detained](#), and seven were taken to an immigration detention center in Tacoma, Washington.

After that raid, people in [Woodburn](#) reported a significant [downturn in business](#) and more widespread fear.

“We really want the community to feel safe,” said Scott Derickson, Woodburn’s administrator. “We try to mitigate unreasonable fear in our community and encourage people to access services and resources that we offer as a local government without fear.”

Derickson said the city has intentionally met with local farmworker advocacy groups and religious institutions to let people know about the role of city government, and the programs and services available to people without fear of arrests.

#### **Oregon lawmakers look to make it harder for tax delinquents to get government contracts**

*Oregon Live | By Hillary Borrud*

Under a proposal introduced by the House Revenue Committee, state agencies would be required to obtain proof of compliance with Oregon tax laws for all businesses seeking state contracts and then check compliance on an ongoing basis.

Current state law allows departments to rely on contractors’ say-so that they are complying with tax laws, a process that legislative analysts described as “self-certification.”

Oregon law already generally prohibits state agencies from contracting with businesses that are delinquent on their taxes, including property taxes. But there’s no prohibition against doing business with a company whose leadership personally owes back taxes. The bill being considered by the House Revenue Committee does not currently address that issue.

#### **Greater Idaho secessionists make billboard pitch to Salem lawmakers: ‘Release eastern Oregon’**

*Oregon Live | By Tatum Todd*

They’re for the eyes of state senators and representatives heading into the capital. Instead of slogans for products, they bear a very specific political message, stating: “RELEASE EASTERN OREGON” and “WE CHOOSE IDAHO.”

Supporters of the grassroots campaign want to escape policies embraced by the [Democratic majority in the Oregon Legislature](#) that they say don’t align with their values. They’d rather be residents of conservative Idaho – but without having to leave their homes and established lives.

In general, they’d like less regulation and lower taxes, even if that means fewer government services. The ultimate goal is more freedom. They believe the state’s politicians – including liberal ones from Oregon’s big cities – should understand their frustrations.

The new billboards went up a day before Oregon’s legislative session began on Tuesday. Sen. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, has already introduced a bill that invites the Idaho Legislature to engage in border talks with Oregon. Supporters also plan to introduce a bill in the Oregon House that calls for a feasibility task force, McCaw told The Oregonian/OregonLive.

Greater Idaho advocates recognize that their best bet could be to get [President Donald Trump to use the bully pulpit](#) to push forward their objective. They sent a letter to Trump last month asking him to back their plan.

### [Oregon insiders: Who's who in and around state government](#)

*Oregon Capital Insider* | By Dick Hughes

Former Oregon Senate Republican Leader **Tim Knopp**, of Bend, is the new state co-chair of U.S. Term Limits. He replaces new state Rep. **Alex Skarlatos**, R-Winston. Former congressional candidate **Andrew Kalloch** is the Democratic co-chair.

### [Oregon legislative staffers reach tentative labor deal with lawmakers as session begins](#)

*OPB* | By Dirk VanderHart

Oregon lawmakers can probably take labor strife within the Capitol off the [list of pressing](#) issues this legislative session.

Late last week, a union that bargains on behalf of around 150 legislative aides within the building [announced](#) it had reached a tentative agreement with management on a new two-year contract.

### [Oregon lawmaker targets surprise fees](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle* | By Julia Shumway

An Oregon lawmaker's pricier-than-expected trip to a minor league baseball game could lead to a state law blocking surprise fees and forcing vendors to be transparent in online transactions.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, introduced [Senate Bill 430](#), which received its first public hearing on Thursday, after his outing to a Eugene Emeralds game with his softball team last May went awry. His bill would require all online retailers to display a written summary of the transaction, including any fees or charges, before a buyer checks out and ensure that buyers can walk away from the sale.

Sen. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, described the absurdity of some fees with a comparison to brick-and-mortar stores.

"Could you imagine going into your local grocery store and getting to the front and the clerk checks you out and then says, 'We added a \$20 convenience fee?'" he said.

### [Commentary: Oregonians have a better way of doing taxes this year](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle* | By Juan Carlos Ordonez

For Oregonians, this tax season ushers in a profound change in how we file our taxes. Since the advent of electronic filing, we have needed to pay a middleman — usually a big corporation — just to carry out our civic duty to pay taxes. No longer.

This year, Oregonians will have access to [Direct File](#). This online tool will allow some 640,000 Oregonians to easily prepare and file their returns directly with the IRS — for free. The launch of Direct File marks the start of a better way of doing taxes, one that cuts out the middleman.

The arrival of Direct File has been a long time coming, the culmination of more than two decades of efforts to put the public interest ahead of those of, mainly, [one big corporation](#). In 2002, as more people opted to file taxes electronically, the [Bush administration](#) floated the idea of creating "an easy, no-cost option for taxpayers to file their tax return online." But such talk from the White House triggered alarm bells at Intuit, maker of TurboTax.

### [Public Utility Commission defends rate approval process to Oregon lawmakers](#)

*KATU* | By Vasili Varlamos

Many Oregonians are frustrated with rising utility bills, and state legislators are working on solutions to mitigate those costs.

### [Lincoln County's two legislators want 2025 session now underway to address issues, finish projects started in 2023](#)

*YaChats News*

If the biggest issues facing the 2025 Legislature – transportation, housing, behavioral health, education funding, wildfires – seem familiar to you, Sen. Dick Anderson and Rep. David Gomberg sympathize.

“You may have noticed over time that legislative members never finish anything,” said Anderson, R-Lincoln City. He’s joking. Sort of.

In separate interviews with the YachatsNews, both legislators emphasized that those issues are big enough that it’s unrealistic to expect them to be solved in the two years between the state’s long legislative sessions, held in odd-numbered years. “You can’t do it in a biennium and walk away,” Anderson said.

For example, Anderson said, coastal communities trying to find room for new housing have a space problem that communities in central or eastern Oregon don’t share — a community on the coast, obviously, can’t grow to the west. And expanding to the east often isn’t an option either because of federally owned land or geography. Even growing to the north and south can be a challenge, thanks to wetlands or marshes.

A community with limited options for expansion might need to concentrate on infill housing. But that raises other questions: How does it fund the necessary infrastructure – water and sewer, for example — or find adequate municipal staff to handle permitting and other regulatory duties?

Anderson said he wanted to try to find answers to a straightforward housing question: “How do we get more actual production of units?”

That’s the spirit behind one of his proposals for the session, a measure that would give local governments 45 days to respond to a building-permit application if the residence is in an area zoned for housing. Anderson also is the chief sponsor of a measure, Senate Bill 898, that would allow cities in need of housing to add a project area to their urban growth boundaries.

Anderson already has a couple of transportation-related bills in the works. One, SB 571, requires the state to study road infrastructure as it relates to housing. Another, SB 564, would widen Highway 20 from Southwest 15<sup>th</sup> Street in Corvallis to Philomath.

Anderson said: “It’s more up to the Democrats than it is the Republicans.”

Both Gomberg and Anderson emphasized that most work lawmakers tackle during the session is handled in a bipartisan way.

As Anderson told a reporter: “I’m hoping for a very boring, long discussion about state government stuff – education, health care, infrastructure, housing. All the boring stuff that you guys don’t care about as writers. That’s what we’re hoping for.”

Sen. Dick Anderson is listed as a chief sponsor of about three dozen measures so far this session. Here are highlights:

- Senate Bill 434 would direct some of the money from the state transient lodging tax into a fund to help manage state recreation areas along the ocean shore;
- SB 438 would allow the owner of property outside an urban growth area to locate an additional dwelling on the property for occupancy by a relative;
- SB 565 would require the state to study existing, expanding and establishing state campgrounds within 25 miles of the coast;
- SB 566 would maintain standard time year-round in Oregon, if California and Washington make the same change;

- SB 570 would increase the maximum percentage that a local government could impose on the sale of marijuana items; and
- HB 2304 would remove the requirement that net proceeds from the Oregon Lottery allocated to the County Fair Account cannot exceed \$1.53 million.

Anderson and Gomberg are co-sponsors on these bills:

- HB 2973 requires the state to study options for funding marine cleanup;
- HB 3140 provides that an operator of sports, fitness or recreational activities can require a participant to release the operator from claims for ordinary negligence; and
- HB 3149 allows for additional distribution of state money to wildfire-impacted school districts for an additional four years.

## **ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**

### **[Oregon's nitrate ground pollution became notably worse in past 10 years, report finds](#)**

*OPB / By Ryan Haas*

Around 40% of the wells tested showed a nitrate level exceeding 10 milligrams per liter, which is the level in water before adverse health effects are likely to occur, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. A reading as low as 3 milligrams per liter generally indicates the water is contaminated outside naturally occurring levels, according to the EPA.

The leading causes of the pollution, and best way to fix it, are a matter of debate in the region. Many residents who have complained about pollution in their drinking water [point to the local agriculture industry](#) as the source because farmers often apply nitrate-rich fertilizers to their fields. Many of those agriculture companies say they [want to help fix the problem](#), but need to understand the issue better first.

State officials have also had to contend with balancing the needs of the agriculture industry — a major employer in the area — with the health concerns surrounding nitrates. Earlier this month, Kotek issued an order that [allowed the Port of Morrow to exceed its permit for dumping nitrate-rich wastewater](#) on fields because, according to the governor, failing to do so could have jeopardized jobs.

### **[Searing city report recommends denial of PGE's Forest Park transmission proposal](#)**

*Oregon Live / By Gozia Wozniacka*

A Portland General Electric proposal to upgrade existing transmission lines in Forest Park would cut down too many trees, harm local efforts to combat climate change and fails to adequately consider alternatives, a searing city staff report concludes.

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

*Oregon Capital Chronicle / By Jordan Rane*

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. The agency wrapped its second public comment period for the project late last month after the release of a [Draft Environmental Assessment](#).

### **[Amazon ramps up clean power for Oregon data centers. Does that mean less for everyone else?](#)**

*Oregon Live / By Mike Rogoway*

Amazon's server farms in eastern Oregon are using much less fossil fuel to power their operations, new data shows, sharply reducing its carbon emissions after five years of steep increases.

The shift is apparent in a new state report on the small electric utility that serves Amazon's data centers in Morrow and Umatilla counties. While Amazon's power usage isn't disclosed individually, the company is by far the largest customer for the small Umatilla Electric Cooperative, a member-owned utility that serves the eastern Oregon counties.

While Amazon is cleaning up its electricity, though, its rapid shift to renewable energy creates other issues for the region's power mix. Nearly all of Amazon's newly acquired renewable power comes from hydroelectricity — a tightly constrained resource that was already maxed out.

So more hydro for Amazon means less for everyone else, especially as data centers' power appetite continues to grow. That complicates the regional energy picture, pressuring other utilities and customers who want renewable power.

That could spur construction of new wind and solar farms, and transmission lines to connect those facilities to the energy grid. Eventually, that might help clean up the regional power supply and help fight climate change — despite the growing demands for electricity from regional data centers.

For at least the next several years, though, the enormous growth in power demand from Oregon's data center industry is scrambling the regional energy market and complicating the region's shift to renewable power.

## **HEALTHCARE**

### **[Oregon lawmakers ignore beleaguered prison medical system in first hearing with agency executive](#)**

*Oregon Live | By Noelle Crombie*

Reese on Tuesday offered the House and Senate Judiciary committees a broad overview of the prison system he has led for more than a year, identifying three "main challenges" facing the agency.

He called security and healthcare staffing the "biggest and most difficult challenge," followed by the complex medical, mental health and post-prison housing needs of prisoners and IT "so antiquated that we no longer have developers that can work on that system."

Reese also told lawmakers that the Oregon State Penitentiary is woefully outdated, comparing the state's oldest prison to the infamous and now-shuttered Alcatraz.

The prison health system, meanwhile, struggles to adequately serve Oregon's prisoners -- challenges extensively documented in court filings.

The Oregonian/OregonLive emailed each member of both committees to ask why they did not pose any questions to Reese regarding prison medical care.

Three responded.

In an email, Sen. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, referred questions to the chairs of the House and Senate Judiciary committees. "You asked questions that deserve answers," McLane said. "I hope the Chairs will answer your questions."

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

*News from the States | By Ben Botkin*

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.

The Medicaid-funded Oregon Health Plan, which insures more than one in three Oregonians, plays a role in the ongoing financial woes, said Becky Hultberg, president and CEO of the Hospital Association of Oregon. Rising operating costs, primarily labor, are also a big driver in hospital expenses exceeding income, she said.

The association, which represents 61 hospitals in the state, wants the Legislature to work on adequately funding the state's Medicaid program and take other steps, like making it easier for hospitals to discharge patients when they are ready to exit the hospital into other settings, like long-term care.

## EDUCATION

### [Portland teacher fired for insubordination receives \\$295,000 settlement from district](#)

*Oregon Live | By Julia Silverman*

For years, Chu was an outspoken activist for racial equity and social justice in the classroom and a frequent, bitingly critical presence at school board meetings. His case was notable because he requested that his [termination hearing](#) be public.

### [Editorial: Oregon student share of higher education cost | Opinion |](#)

*Bend Bulletin*

Oregon is 37th in state investment in public education for higher education appropriations per student full time equivalent. In 2023, Oregon was at about \$8,400. The national average was around \$11,000. Oregon's tuition and fees for community colleges are the second highest in the West at \$6,464 per academic year. Oregon's tuition and fees for its public four-year institutions are No.1, meaning the most expensive, at \$13,440 per academic year. Tuition and fees are set by the boards of those institutions, but the level of support from the state is inescapably important.

And the amount that Oregon students provide for their education at public universities has grown over the years. In the 1960s in Oregon, the state support was about 75%. It is now about 25%.

## INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION

### [Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek's executive order on state construction work prompts outcry in Salem and beyond](#)

*OPB | By Dirk VanderHart*

It's an executive order issued by Gov. Tina Kotek late last year – one that offers a leg up to her labor union allies who seek work on billions of dollars of state-run construction projects.

In recent days, Republicans have blasted Kotek's [Dec. 18 order](#) more than any piece of policy being proposed by legislative Democrats this year.

"For crying out loud to drop that thing right before Christmas and then let people go on vacation," Senate Minority Leader Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, said earlier this month. "I've got contractors in my district saying, 'Are you kidding me? What does this mean?'"

Labor groups have pushed to require the deals for publicly funded projects, but lawmakers haven't agreed. [A 2023 bill](#) that would have expanded use of PLAs died after a single public hearing in which unions cheered the idea and many public agencies opposed it.

"In rural areas we already have issues getting contractors to bid, especially on larger projects," the Association of Oregon Counties wrote in testimony on the bill. "This would just add unneeded complexity and would prevent many local contractors from bidding."

### [Oregon, Washington enter uncertain moment for I-5 bridge project as Trump takes office](#)

*OPB | By Eric Neumann*

If all goes to plan, crews will begin major construction in the Columbia River on a new Interstate Bridge in 2027, ending decades of planning and consternation over a botched plan to fix the aging bridge between Vancouver and Portland more than a decade ago.

That's assuming the current effort isn't derailed by an incoming Trump administration that has said it plans to cut government spending, with a critical eye toward Biden-era policies that could be necessary to paying for the bridge.

While there is wide political agreement that the roughly century-old bridge is a problematic source of congestion during rush-hour commutes, the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program has critics as well as champions, and its future is not certain.

The new interstate bridge will broadly be financed in three buckets, according to McEnerny-Ogle: state funds, tolls and federal dollars. Washington and Oregon have each pledged \$1 billion. Discussions about driver tolls to recoup money over the long term are currently happening with the Oregon and Washington departments of transportation. That leaves the federal government, which has so far committed around \$2 billion.