

Oregon News

POLITICS

Two Oregon House Bills ask for more financial aid for wildfire-impacted school districts

KATU | By Vasili Varlamos

Over four years after the devastating 2020 wildfires, several Oregon school districts still need financial support as they rebuild. Two new house bills, 3165 and 3941, aim to provide both short-term and long-term aid to districts impacted by the blazes.

[House Bill 3165](#) requests the legislature to allocate funds for the current school year, while [House Bill 3941](#) proposes more than \$38 million in funding over the next four school years. These bills build on House Bill 2046, passed in 2022, which provided \$25 million for the four districts—Santiam Canyon, Phoenix-Talent, Lincoln County, and McKenzie—based on their 2019 pre-wildfire enrollment.

Barry said the long-term funding would support summer and after-school programs, tutoring options, mental health services, and more.

Both Barry and Miller said the enrollment numbers have ticked up slightly but are still nowhere near the numbers before the fires.

Both bills are currently in the House Committee on Education, and the source of funding remains undetermined. Rep. Marsh said the Ways and Means Committee would make the decision.

Oregon government ethics commission will probe Kotek's spending on parking, dinner

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway

Saying they needed more information, members of the Oregon Government Ethics Commission voted Friday to investigate Gov. Tina Kotek's reported spending on parking, concert tickets and an employee recognition buffet.

Auditors with the Secretary of State's Office [flagged the spending](#), which they described as "minor" and "unintentional" apparent violations of state ethics law, earlier in January. The ethics commission discussed the findings Friday and concluded it didn't have enough information to decide how to move forward.

Farm advocates ask Oregon lawmakers for study on regulatory burdens

Capital Press | By Mateusz Perkowski

Oregon agriculture advocates are asking lawmakers to fund a study examining how mounting regulations have affected the competitiveness of the state's farm industry.

Under House Bill 2166, the Oregon Department of Agriculture would have to analyze the "overall regulatory burden" facing farmers and ranchers compared to those in other states and to other industries.

The study would also look at other factors affecting the farm industry, such as climate change, wildfires, drought, labor shortages, water availability and gaps in crop insurance coverage.

"Individually, these challenges present Oregon producers with a difficult daily operating environment. Collectively, they threaten our fundamental economic viability," said Angela Bailey, a nursery owner and president of the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Mike McCarthy, an orchardist and farmer in Hood River County, provided the House Agriculture Committee with more than 40 compliance requirements specific to farmers in the state, apart from general business regulations.

"What we do in the evening is worry about this list. We don't have the staff to do it. We don't have the time to do it," McCarthy said. "And the unfortunate thing is the rules keep changing and that makes it even more difficult."

[Can legislators shield consumers from the cost of powering data centers in Oregon? Beat Check podcast](#)

Oregon Live

Oregon's residential electricity rates [have gone up nearly 50%](#) in the Portland area in just the past four years. Those increases have primarily been [driven by the rising costs](#) to buy power from the open energy market. But there's growing concern that the rapid expansion of power-hungry data centers [could significantly drive up](#) residential power bills in the coming years.

Already, data centers consume more than 10% of all Oregon's electricity. Power planners expect tech companies' power use will double by the end of the decade, or perhaps quadruple.

[Rep. Cliff Bentz 'looking forward' to boosting Trump agenda](#)

KOIN | By Ken Boddie

Once again, Cliff Bentz is the lone Republican congressman from Oregon — but he represents District 2, one of the largest geographical districts in the country where, he said, 85% of the residents are glad Donald Trump is back in the White House.

One of the big energy users in District 2 is the Google data center in The Dalles. Recently, Bentz introduced legislation to transfer 150 acres of federal land in The Dalles' watershed to the city of The Dalles. He said "transferring this land to the city would give it a chance to increase the size of its reservoir and also further protect that watershed."

That includes Trump's stated plan for mass deportations.

"The challenge is going to be how to make sure that people who haven't committed crimes are afforded the protections that the law provides them," Bentz said. "And I think they will be, but right now, the focus is going to be on those who've committed crimes."

Bentz likewise understands the desire for many to join the Greater Idaho movement, but "it's going to be extraordinarily difficult" for Idaho to swallow up a large portion of Oregon "if for no other reason than tax arrangements and road funding."

[Chavez-DeRemer awaits confirmation, Oregon's Democrat Senators signal support](#)

KATU | By Bobby Corser

Two new members of President Donald Trump's cabinet were sworn in on Saturday. Pete Hegseth will lead the Department of Defense, and Kristi Noem was sworn in as Secretary of Homeland Security. This brings the total number of confirmed and sworn-in cabinet members to four.

Lori Chavez-DeRemer, Trump's nominee for Labor Secretary, is still awaiting her confirmation hearing. Chavez-DeRemer, a Republican, served one term in Congress representing Oregon's 5th District, was defeated in November's election by Democrat Janelle Bynum.

[Oregon mayors plan to lobby legislature during session](#)

KOIN | By Ken Boddie

As the Oregon legislature starts its 2025 session, their money decisions trickle down to the cities and counties of the state. A consortium of 26 mayors will lobby the legislature throughout this session to lay out their agenda and fight for each of their locales.

[Trump says he wants to overhaul FEMA as he travels to North Carolina and California](#)

OPB

President Trump said on Friday that he plans to sign an executive order to overhaul the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as he traveled to one state working to recover from catastrophic flooding, and another actively battling some of the worst wildfires in its history.

Touring parts of [North Carolina](#) hit hard by flooding after Hurricane Helene, Trump said he thinks the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, is too bureaucratic and slow. He suggested that state governments handle disasters within their states.

Trump's press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, later told reporters traveling on Air Force One that the executive order would direct a FEMA advisory council to "look at the agency and root out the corruption, the incompetence and the bureaucracy," but would not abolish the agency.

Trump has also indicated he sees aid for California as leverage for getting support from Democrats in Congress for some of his legislative priorities.

IMMIGRATION

[Oregon officials, religious leaders support immigrants](#)

KOIN | By Lisa Balick

Engaged citizens packed [McDaniel High School](#) in Portland Sunday afternoon for a town hall with Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley, Rep. Maxine Dexter and Portland Mayor Keith Wilson.

Immigration was a big topic among the questions for the DC lawmakers.

"We have a sanctuary state. We have a sanctuary city. We have a sanctuary county," Dexter said, adding she will make sure local officials stand with immigrants.

"There are not sufficient federal resources to implement the deportations such as our president is threatening," she said.

"We just all need to recognize that all of us are immigrants or descendants of immigrants," Merkley said, "and be standing with our fellow community members who, at this point, are extremely stressed by the idea that their families may be ripped apart by President Trump."

Both Merkley and Dexter said they stand in support of Wilson's statement to protect the sanctuary status of the city and the state for undocumented residents.

[WATCH: As Trump vows mass deportation, an Oregon church prepares to provide refuge](#)

AP News

A pastor in Portland, Oregon, says his church is preparing to provide sanctuary to people lacking legal status who risk being removed from the country under President Donald Trump's plans to conduct mass deportations.

[Colombia backs down on deportation flights after Trump tariffs threat](#)

BBC

A looming trade war between the US and Colombia appears to have been averted after the Colombian government agreed to allow US military flights carrying deported migrants to land in the Andean country.

The spat erupted on Sunday when President Gustavo Petro barred two military planes carrying Colombians deported from the US from landing.

The Trump administration responded by threatening to slap punitive tariffs on Colombian exports to the US.

President Petro at first said Colombia would retaliate by imposing tariffs on US goods, but the White House later announced that Colombia had agreed to accept migrants - including those arriving on US military aircraft - "without limitation or delay".

The White House hailed the agreement with Colombia as a victory for Trump's hard-line approach, after the country's two leaders had exchanged threats on social media on Sunday.

"Today's events make clear to the world that America is respected again," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt wrote in a statement.

She also said that President Donald Trump "expects all other nations of the world to fully co-operate in accepting deportation of their citizens illegally present in the United States".

Colombia has accepted deportation flights from the US in the past. In 2024, 124 planes carrying deported migrants from the US landed in the country.

But President Petro appeared to object to the return of deportees on military rather than civilian flights - and to the way the migrants may be treated on those military flights.

In his posts on X, Petro referenced a news video showing migrants deported from the US to Brazil, who had been handcuffed and had their feet restrained during the deportation flight.

[YVYV: Oregon Attorney General Dan Rayfield on Trump's birthright citizenship order](#)

KATU

A federal judge in Washington has temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's executive order aimed at modifying birthright citizenship, just six days into his presidency.

HEALTH CARE

[Oregon hospitals back Medicaid tax renewal to make health care more accessible](#)

OPB | By Amelia Templeton

Oregon's hospitals are lobbying [to renew a tax on themselves, and on health insurance plans](#), that the state uses to shore up funding for the Oregon Health Plan, the Medicaid program that pays for health care for people living near the poverty line.

In a press conference Wednesday, the Hospital Association of Oregon, a powerful nonprofit lobbying group that represents hospitals' interests, said re-upping the tax is their top priority this legislative session. The Oregon Health Plan is the single largest insurer in the state, providing coverage to 1 in 3 Oregonians and 56% of children, according to the association. Hospitals want the tax because it allows the state to qualify for more federal funding for the Oregon Health Plan. It raises about a quarter of the total funding for Oregon's Medicaid program, primarily by drawing down a federal match. The state gets roughly \$2 dollars from the federal government for every dollar it puts into Medicaid. A well-funded Medicaid program means hospitals get paid more for the care they provide to poor Oregonians, and spend less on unreimbursed care for the uninsured. Oregon's current hospital tax went into effect in 2019 and will expire September 30 this year, while the tax on health insurance plans will expire at the end of 2026.

This week, Democratic leaders in the legislature, Senate President Rob Wagner and House Speaker Julie Fahey said they hoped to pass the provider tax extensions in the first half of the session. "The stated intention is to try to get everybody around the table," Wagner said, "to get a bipartisan vote out of this." Republican Daniel Bonham, the senate minority leader, said that bipartisan support isn't guaranteed. "I don't believe in taxing health care, as a blanket statement," he said. "I'm struggling right now, as a member of the minority party that doesn't feel included, to want to participate."

Bonham added that he was concerned Democrats would try to get an early win on the provider tax "and come with hyper-partisan things late." That's in reference to the dynamic during the 2023 session, which began with bipartisan compromises on housing and economic development, and ended with a six-week long Republican walk-out over an abortion bill.

[Oregon lawmakers to Providence, strikers: Get a deal](#)

KOIN | By Tim Steele

"We call on both parties to bring this commitment to justice to the bargaining table, to actively engage in bargaining all contracts, and to offer and negotiate proposals that meaningfully address caregiver concerns about wages, working conditions, and staffing," [the open letter](#) signed by Reps. Suzanne Bonamici, Val Hoyle, Andrea Salinas, [Maxine Dexter](#) and Janelle Bynum plus Senators [Ron Wyden](#) and

Jeff Merkley said. "On behalf of the millions of Oregonians we represent, it is our sincere hope that ONA and Providence negotiate contracts in good faith as swiftly as possible."

A spokesperson for the Oregon Nurses Association told KOIN 6 News on Sunday they are "deeply disappointed in Providence executives for bargaining in bad faith and without the urgency that this moment requires."

The ONA added "Providence has shown zero movement on wages and health benefits. ... All Oregonians should be deeply troubled by Providence prioritizing their healthcare executives instead of the caregivers on the frontlines of healthcare."

Sunday afternoon, Providence spokesperson Gary Walker told KOIN 6 News by email, "Providence negotiators continue to work closely with federal mediators. The current proposals from the union are not financially sustainable. As we've said before, only the Oregon Nurses Association can decide to end the strike. Based on its rhetoric, we continue to anticipate a lengthy walkout."

Providence health care strike reaches third week with no resolution

Oregon Live

Nearly 5,000 Providence nurses, along with about 150 doctors and advanced practitioners, [walked off the job indefinitely](#) earlier this month. The strike includes workers at all eight Providence hospitals in Oregon and six women's clinics in the Portland metro area.

Dexter, meanwhile, said that doctors and nurses are "being increasingly pressured by the powers of corporate health care" and that inadequate wages and working conditions are driving workers to strike.

Lawmakers Will Consider Unemployment Benefits for Striking Workers

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

[Senate Bill 916](#), written at the request of the AFL-CIO of Oregon, would amend current Oregon law, which deems strikers ineligible for unemployment.

The bill has not yet been scheduled for a hearing but has been assigned to the Senate Committee on Labor and Business. Given that the committee's chair, state Sen. Kathleen Taylor (D-Portland), is one of the bill's chief sponsors, it is highly likely to get an airing. It doesn't hurt that the labor group that requested the bill, the AFL-CIO, represents 288 unions, which in turn represent more than 300,000 Oregon workers.

Two states, New York and New Jersey, already allow striking workers to collect unemployment. A bill similar to SB 916 is also under consideration in the Washington Legislature this year.

Misdemeanor defendants with mental illness wouldn't go to Oregon State Hospital under new proposal

Oregon Live | By Maxine Bernstein

Disability Rights Oregon wants the state to send only felony defendants who are unable to aid in their own defense and need mental health treatment to the state psychiatric hospital — not those facing misdemeanors or lower-level violations - as Oregon continues to [flout a federal court order](#) for quicker admissions.

That request and others will go before a federal judge during a two-day hearing set to start March 11 on the nonprofit advocacy organization's [motion to hold the state](#) in civil contempt for failing to meet the seven-day admission requirement.

The state blamed the lack of available community mental health placements for the continued problem of criminal defendants languishing in jail while waiting for admission to Oregon State Hospital after they have been found unable to assist in their defense because of mental illness.

The group also wants the judge to set time limits for how long someone whose most serious charge is a misdemeanor can remain in a community mental health restoration program and elevate a neutral expert in the long-standing case to serve as a court monitor.

In December, 111 defendants found unable to assist in their own defense were admitted to the state hospital, while 99 others were discharged that month. Their average wait for admission last month was 25 days, according to state data. On Dec. 31, 82 aid-and-assist defendants were waiting to be admitted. The governor's budget includes \$90 million for secure residential treatment centers that can help restore mental competency for defendants and accept patients waiting to be discharged from the state hospital who have been found unable to assist in their defense or are considered guilty except for insanity.

Health officials say Eugene medical chain, two Oregon insurers unreasonably raised costs

Oregon Live | By Kristine de Leon

The state in 2021 set a cap on annual spending growth for health care organizations at 3.4% per person, part of a regulatory bid to rein in rising health care costs. The Oregon Legislature [authorized the program](#) in 2019 and updated the law in 2021.

The Oregon Health Authority on Wednesday flagged three organizations for overshooting this limit between 2021 and 2022 without justifying the increase. They include Eugene-based Oregon Medical Group and two insurers, Moda Health and UnitedHealthcare, both of which managed Medicare Advantage plans.

Meanwhile, the state reported that 28 other health care organizations also overshot this limit but "had acceptable reasons." Justifications offered by the providers and insurers that the state deemed acceptable included expanding services such as behavioral health, longer hospital stays due to limited skilled nursing capacity, and increased Medicaid enrollment and usage.

The state found that cost of care for privately insured patients at Oregon Medical Group, which owns a chain of clinics in the Eugene area, surged by 6.5% — nearly double the state's target growth rate.

Salem to consider charging Salem Hospital more for medical waste disposal

Salem Reporter | By Abbey McDonald

A month after the Brooks garbage incinerator [stopped accepting trash from Marion County](#), the Salem City Council will consider higher medical waste collection rates that would nearly triple what Salem Hospital pays to dispose of sharps, bandages and other potentially infectious waste.

If approved, hospital disposal rates would increase by 168% on Feb. 1. Salem Hospital would pay \$28.55 for 35 gallons of medical waste, compared to \$10.65 in 2024.

Salem Health generates about 20 tons of medical waste per month, said spokeswoman Lisa Wood in an email to Salem Reporter.

Oregon Health Authority Sets Timeline for Controversial Rule Change

Willamette Week | By Sophie Peel

Last month, *WW* [reported](#) that the Oregon Health Authority would issue rulemaking in early 2025 that would bar therapists in training from billing Medicaid if they work independently of a Medicaid-contracted clinic.

The proposed change met strong pushback from the mental health workforce, which noted that such therapists, called board-registered associates, often have the highest volume of Medicaid patients. Not allowing them to bill Medicaid would leave thousands of low-income patients without a therapist this year, practitioners argued.

"The quality assurance is the reason for the change," wrote OHA leaders to various providers in a Jan. 15 memo about the upcoming rules. "OHA wants to ensure all behavioral health services meet the same standards across the state when public funds are being utilized."

TRANSPORTATION

[Business Group Urges Kotek to Follow New Washington Governor's Lead in Speeding Permits](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

Angela Wilhelms, CEO of Oregon Business & Industry, the state's largest business group, promptly wrote to Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek, asking her to follow Ferguson's lead.

"Gov. Ferguson has taken immediate action to address an issue that not only impacts businesses and individuals regulated by cumbersome, costly and time-consuming processes, but one that impedes the state's ability to make good on its own policy goals and requirements in a timely manner," Wilhelms wrote Jan. 17.

[ODOT launches roadwork projects to boost safety in Southern Oregon](#)

KDVR | By Samantha Kadera

In Curry County, a \$4.5 million emergency repair project will address sunken road surfaces on U.S. 101, with work taking place between mileposts 303-306 and 342-351. Single-lane traffic and delays of less than 20 minutes are expected. Additionally, pavement repairs will be made in Gold Beach and Brookings with intermittent lane closures and minor delays.

In Jackson County, a \$12 million project on Oregon 99 will widen the road from East Glenwood Road to Coleman Creek Bridge to improve safety, pedestrian access, and drainage. Expect intermittent lane closures Monday through Friday. Another project in Medford at the Big X intersection, totaling \$15.9 million, will involve nighttime lane closures for repaving, bridge work, and traffic signal upgrades.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

[Do Good Multnomah to Close Shelter in Old Downtown Bus Station, Citing Safety Issues](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

Hovanas said he and his staff tried for two years to find a place to relocate the shelter and its 96 beds, but the Joint Office of Homeless Services, the county agency that cooperates with the city on homeless issues, rejected four options.

"Two of these proposals included detailed staffing plans and feasibility studies demonstrating the viability of the suggested sites," Hovanas wrote. "Regrettably, JOHS declined all four options and has confirmed that replacing this site is not part of their current plans."

Early today, Multnomah County said it was in talks to fund more beds at the Bybee Lakes Hope Center to replace the beds lost downtown. The Bybee Lakes facility, housed in what was once the Wapato Jail in North Portland, is 10 miles from Do Good's downtown shelter.

The shift of funds to Bybee Lakes Hope Center is the latest step in a striking reversal by county officials, who for much of the past decade [viewed the shelter with skepticism](#). Bybee Lakes' model, which requires people receiving its services to kick their drug habits and travel to the far edge of town, ran counter to what county policymakers saw as best practices—even as it was lauded by property owners fed up with conditions downtown.

The news of Do Good's shelter closure comes as newly elected Mayor Keith Wilson is pushing to open more shelters so that people swept from camps have a place to go. On Wednesday, Wilson unveiled his ["blueprint"](#) for ending unsheltered homelessness, proposing to spend \$28 million to create 1,500 beds and open four day shelters.

EDUCATION

[Money, special education, cellphones and safety: Some key education bills in Oregon's 2025 legislative session](#)

OPB | By Natalie Pate

The largest focus for school spending is on the [State School Fund](#), the multi-billion dollar bucket of money the state draws from to support districts. The fund operates on a two-year cycle and is a major focus for lawmakers in odd-numbered years.

That funding is based on a weighted average enrollment. But fewer students are enrolling in Oregon's public schools, as [previously reported by OPB](#), which means less state money is going to school districts. At the same time, costs to provide the same services in schools are going up.

Gov. Tina Kotek has proposed a way to [restructure the state's school funding formula](#) and get more money to districts. But retirement costs are projected to skyrocket over the next two years, canceling out much of the money saved from the effort.

Several placeholder bills — such as [Senate Bill 302](#) and [House Bill 2453](#) — aim to evaluate the adequacy of Oregon's public K-12 system. Meanwhile, proposals like [Senate Bill 311](#) would require the Oregon Department of Education to study the adequacy of state funding.

Oregon already has a [Quality Education Commission](#), whose job is to recommend adequate spending levels to support public schools. For years, it has recommended more funding than lawmakers have provided, even with [record investments](#).

Lawmakers will also decide this year whether to raise the cap on special education funding.

[**Preliminary Enrollment Forecasts Show Steeper Decline to Come for Portland Public Schools**](#)

Willamette Week | By Joanna Hou

In a newly released calculation, Portland State University researchers forecast that Portland Public Schools enrollment will decline by nearly 15% in the next decade.

Kindergarten enrollment isn't rising in the ways forecasters predicted.

It appears that forecasters are taking that trajectory seriously. While they forecasted 3,115 kindergartners for the 2025–26 school year in last year's report, they now forecast 2,767.

Declining enrollment is a concern for the district's funding; Oregon pays for each student PPS reports. It's also a factor that has emerged amid the latest budget conversations. The district faces a \$40 million shortfall in the 2025–26 academic year. Its [first draft of reductions](#) proposes cutting \$12.2 million from the central administration budget and \$29.1 million from school budgets.

[**Wyden Decided Against Protecting the Owyhee. Oregonians May Not Get Another Chance Soon.**](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

Presidents can designate national monuments unilaterally. But as *WW* reported last year, Oregon's senior Democratic U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden declined the opportunity to ask Biden to make the Owyhee Canyonlands a monument because he preferred a wilderness designation (["Canyon Standoff," Sept. 25, 2024](#)).

But any wilderness bill must pass both chambers of Congress. Second District Congressman Cliff Bentz (R-Ore.), who represents the Owyhee, and Wyden cooperated in a last-ditch, bipartisan effort to achieve that. Wyden's bill passed the Senate on Dec. 20, but Bentz's slimmer version died in the House without a floor vote. That left conservationists such as Weikel "incredibly disappointed."

Wyden defends his decision: "Legislation generated in Eastern Oregon creating more than 1 million acres of wilderness permanently in the Owyhee, and protecting the ranching way of life and tribal resources is superior to a monument designation in this case because legislation provides the certainty that everyone wants," Wyden says. "Here's why: A monument wouldn't produce 1 new acre of wilderness, but does open the unfortunate prospect of a Trump administration wasting no time to upend a Biden administration designation and generating an endless cycle of litigation. The fact that the Senate passed my bill, and that Congressmen Bentz has said he wants a bill this year, shows there's solid momentum to get this legislation done."