

Oregon News

POLITICS

Legislation would require Oregon's public retirement plans to prioritize climate goals when investing

OPB / By Monica Samayoa

Climate change threatens the long-term performance of the state's PERS funds, "which is why Treasury set the Net Zero goal," Steiner wrote in testimony she intended to submit Tuesday to the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Governance and Veterans. "Going forward, we will keep our investment strategies up to date with the evolving climate science and the emerging growth opportunities the transition to clean energy offers."

Currently, PERS' overall portfolio is about \$94 billion and it pays out more than \$400 million in retirement benefits every month. As of 2021, about \$3.6 billion, or about 3% of the overall fund, was invested in fossil fuels.

According to the "A Pathway to Net Zero" plan, the goal is to cut the portfolio's carbon emissions by 60% by 2035 and reach net zero by 2050.

Trump signs executive orders eliminating military DEI programs and reviewing transgender troops policies

OPB / By Ayana Archie

The directive was among a series of executive orders the White House released Monday night that sought to reshape the country's armed forces. Trump also signed executive orders tasking Pentagon officials with [reviewing](#) its policy on transgender troops and [reinstating](#) many service members who were dismissed for refusing the coronavirus vaccine.

The order additionally prohibits the military from telling its members that "America's founding documents are racist or sexist," or from teaching them about gender ideology – defined by the administration as "an ever-shifting concept of self-assessed gender identity."

"In addition, these institutions shall be required to teach that America and its founding documents remain the most powerful force for good in human history," the order said.

Medicare and Social Security benefits will be unaffected by the pause, according to the memo. But there was no explanation of whether the pause would affect Medicaid, food stamps, disaster assistance and other programs. The memo said it should be implemented "to the extent permissible under applicable law."

Editorial: Honeymoon's already over for new city leaders

The Oregonian Editorial Board

The [first document was a report](#) by the tax advisory group for the governor's task force on downtown Portland. Innocuously titled "Nineteen facts about economic, fiscal and service conditions in Portland, Oregon," the report drops fact bombs that illustrate some of the absurd realities of the region's punishing taxing scheme. Not only do Portland residents pay the second-highest marginal-income tax rate in the country, but specialty taxes have led to a flood of unspent money for those programs while revenue for basic public services is sputtering. Employment growth in the Portland-area has also lagged surrounding counties.

But the previous projected General Fund deficit of \$27 million is now forecast to be \$67 million. In addition, non-General Fund dollars that support parks and permitting operations are also expected to fall short. "All told," [a city statement read](#), "the city may need to reduce spending by more than \$100 million to cover the gap during the next budget year."

Even in a city with an \$8 billion budget – where 90% is dedicated to restricted uses, such as providing water service and maintaining roads – a \$100 million deficit translates to widespread cuts to operations

and elimination of jobs. The city may also need to slash grant programs and raise user fees, according to the city's budget memo. And it's unclear how the city would fund new investments, including the additional staff sought by the new City Council. While councilors on Wednesday [authorized \\$4.6 million in contingency funds](#) to add a staff member for each councilor and three for the mayor, that covers only the increase through June 30. Maintaining just this barebones level would require \$12 million in the next budget year.

[Trump pauses federal grants and loans as administration reviews funding](#)

OPB | By Chris Megerian

The White House is pausing federal grants and loans starting on Tuesday as President [Donald Trump's](#) administration begins an across-the-board ideological review of its spending.

The funding freeze by the Republican administration could affect trillions of dollars and cause widespread disruption in health care research, education programs and other initiatives. Even grants that have been awarded but not spent are supposed to be halted.

[Oregon one of the worst states for retirement, WalletHub says](#)

KOIN

Oregon is the 39th worst U.S. state for retirement, according to a new WalletHub study.

WalletHub determined its rankings by comparing metrics like affordability, quality of life and health care. WalletHub Analyst Chip Lupo said that taxes and cost of living are among the biggest impacts on retirees. In the affordability category, Oregon ranked 42nd. Oregon also ranked 32nd in quality of life and 26th in health care.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

[For Gov. Kotek, natural resources adviser, water tops list of 2025 environmental priorities • Oregon Capital Chronicle](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt

In less than a century, Oregon water officials have allocated all surface water under their purview, overallocated groundwater in several basins and have no clear accounting of how much water is still available in others. In May, Kotek [convened](#) a group of prominent water attorneys in the state to present ideas to the Legislature for improving Oregon's water policies, water rights laws and allocation rules. Huntington said the governor's office will back a package of bills that gives state agencies more statutory authority to manage water allocations and regulations in Oregon. Much of that is being sponsored by Rep. Ken Helm, D-Beaverton, and Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, who co-chair the House agriculture and water committee.

Kotek, who was forced in December to convene lawmakers for an [emergency session](#) to pay outstanding wildfire bills, has been following closely a committee appointed by the Legislature last year to come up with long-term wildfire funding solutions to present in the current session.

The group has shared [several ideas](#), including increasing a lodging tax and sending the revenues to the state's wildfire fund, and a one-time investment of the state's \$1.8 billion revenue surplus, known as the "kicker" tax rebate, into a fund where it would earn at least 5% interest per year. Kotek said she expects the group to present its best ideas for wildfire funding to the Legislature in the coming weeks.

None of the proposals include new funding from private investor-owned electric utilities, responsible for some of the most expensive wildfires in Oregon history. Lobbyists from those same companies have sought some protections from future wildfire liabilities in conversations with lawmakers in recent months.

Kotek said she and lawmakers this session are calling for more transparency from the Public Utilities Commission on ratemaking and recent electricity rate hikes that have led to residential customers [shelling out 50% more](#) for electricity today than five years ago. Data centers are behind the

largest and fastest increases in demand, requiring many electric utilities to buy more, and more expensive energy and expand infrastructure to serve the data centers. [Senate Bill 553](#), sponsored by Sen. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, would require the Oregon Department of Energy to study data centers and propose policies to protect Oregonians from steep rate hikes.

[Oregon bill would ban new livestock farms in state's most polluted areas](#)

OPB | By Alejandro Figueroa

The biggest livestock farms would be prohibited from building or expanding in some of Oregon's most polluted groundwater regions, under a proposed bill backed by environmental groups.

Those groups say it will keep nitrate pollution from getting worse in communities that rely on well water for drinking.

A coalition of environmental and sustainable farming advocacy groups is backing [Senate Bill 80](#). Stand Up to Factory Farms argues Oregon should stop permitting new or expanding dairy farms and other big livestock farms from seeking a confined animal feeding operation, or CAFO, permit, in all of Oregon's three [groundwater management areas](#).

Farm lobbying groups in the past have opposed attempts at a ban. They have argued it puts more unnecessary burdens on an industry they say is already over regulated.

It's a move environmental groups say is common sense, especially in the [Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area](#), where nitrate pollution has been a known problem for the last 30 years, and where [recent reports show](#) it has become worse over the past decade. Nitrates can cause cancer and other illnesses if consumed in high quantities, and they're especially harmful to infants.

Michele Okoh, a law professor specializing in environmental justice at Lewis and Clark College, said that, while stopping mega-dairies and other large livestock farms from being built does keep pollution from getting worse, it can be easy for operators to find loopholes.

She said producers could just operate smaller farms. So instead of having one large farm with 30,000 dairy cows, they can operate 10 farms with 3,000 cows. She points to North Carolina, a state that passed a swine farm moratorium in 2007, yet the number of [CAFOs has ballooned](#) in recent years.

Last year, Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek laid out plans to [reduce nitrate pollution](#) in that area, but progress has been slow.

[Nitrate contamination has gotten worse in eastern Oregon over the past decade - oregonlive.com](#)

Oregon Live | By Gosia Wozniacka

The increase in pollution is notable because until recently many people in the region had no idea they had been drinking contaminated water for years – and some still don't know because the state has yet to test all of the area's domestic wells. Research has linked high nitrate consumption over long periods to stomach, bladder and intestinal cancers, miscarriages, as well as thyroid issues. Most of the population in the region is poor, Latino or Indigenous. Much of the nitrate contamination in the region comes from farm fertilizer, animal manure and wastewater that are constantly and abundantly applied to farm fields by the owners of irrigated farmland, confined animal feeding operations, animal feedlots and food processing facilities. Those sources are also the main employers in eastern Oregon.

The state still doesn't collect data on how much synthetic fertilizer is being applied to fields by large-scale irrigated farms and the Oregon Department of Agriculture has yet to start implementing a rule mandated by a 2023 bill that focuses on oversight of growers who apply manure imported from industrial dairies and feedlots.

[Ballot Initiative Would Pave Way for Rebirth of Nuclear Power in Oregon](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

A new ballot initiative filed Jan. 27 would repeal previously approved obstacles to the development of commercial nuclear power plants in Oregon.

[Initiative Petition 18](#), filed by chief petitioner Ian Loney of Neskowin, would strike down two current requirements:

1. That there be a federally licensed, permanent disposal facility for radioactive waste before any new plant can open.
2. That the development of any nuclear plant be approved by a statewide vote.

Voters placed those two requirements into law in 1980 in Ballot Measure 7. (The measure passed 53% to 47%.)

Oregon has committed to reducing carbon emissions to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. That transition requires the development of non-polluting electrical generation, and because of the damage to fish and habitat, new dams are unlikely.

The state's current path to lowering emissions includes the development of wind and solar generation, both of which are intermittent resources. Some advocates believe nuclear plants, which operate continuously, could be part of the solution.

EDUCATION

[Portland Public Schools' costly plan to modernize high schools out of line with similar projects in region, audit finds](#)

Oregon Live / By Julia Silverman

Portland Public Schools' plan to spend up to \$1.15 billion to modernize three aging high schools is far out of line with similar projects in the region, even when accounting for inflation, an independent analysis of the district's spending plans found.

According to the report, released late Friday, items driving up the district's projected construction budget include:

- The use of mass timber, a low-carbon alternative to concrete and steel.
- Complicated site logistics from building in the middle of a city, a particular issue at Cleveland, which at just four acres for the main high school building has by far the smallest footprint of any of the schools in question.
- The district's sustainability and design goals, which include phasing out the use of gas and building to environmentally sustainable LEED Gold standards for mechanical, electric and plumbing systems.
- Including an on-campus health center and teen parent center in all proposed projects.
- The district's workforce diversity goals for subcontractors.

For Beaverton, that cost is around \$13.7 million. For Cleveland, it is estimated at \$42.5 million; for Jefferson, it is estimated at \$56.4 million and for Wells, it is estimated at \$44 million. Portland Public Schools paid \$25 million for the general contractor's conditions when it built Lincoln in 2022, the report says.

IMMIGRATION

[New bill aims to support Oregon immigrants excluded from federal food benefits](#)

OPB / By Bryce Dole

Oregon food advocates on Monday called on state lawmakers to support a bill aimed at helping hungry people who have historically been excluded from federal food benefits because of their immigration status.

In a press conference at the state capitol in Salem, advocates said Senate Bill 611 is especially urgent as Oregon faces a steep rise in hunger.

If passed, the bill would establish the Food for All Oregonians Program in the Department of Human Services with the goal of helping people who can't get federal food assistance through SNAP because of their immigration status. The bill would help people under the age of 25 and over the age of 55. It's not clear how many people would benefit from the program nor how much it would cost. Federal SNAP benefits have never been available to immigrants who don't have legal documentation proving citizenship. Advocates tried to pass similar legislation in Oregon during the 2023 session, but that bill, SB 610, died in committee.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

[Editorial: Fix homeless services program now or risk a ballot box defeat](#)

The Oregonian Editorial Board

But most critically, voters – who were told in 2020 that passing the measure would “end our homeless crisis” – are in no mood to authorize an extension for the tax, set to expire in 2030. Voters are angry that the hundreds of millions of dollars collected since the measure's passage have bought so little progress and revealed so much dysfunction. Even without the [dismal results of a recent poll](#), leaders should have known that asking for an early renewal of the measure this spring was a losing proposition. Before going back to the ballot, Metro and the counties must survey the deep hole of distrust they are in and start climbing out of it. That means doing the work now to deliver clear results backed up by robust data; developing a stronger system of oversight and working across jurisdictions to achieve regional outcomes – even if that means changing the split of dollars among counties. And it means committing to specific goals for the next ballot measure including when they will end unsheltered homelessness and how they intend to use the funds. Only then should they feel justified in asking voters for an extension. Among the issues delaying an agreement are counties' reluctance to specify the kinds of services that individuals – who are identified only by number – receive and counties' insistence that they be given a 10-day review period before Metro be allowed to share with the public and media any data sent by the counties.

[Oregon needs to add 29,500 homes each year, state economist says - oregonlive.com](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway

Oregon needs to build about 29,500 more homes each year, mostly in the Portland region and Willamette Valley, to emerge from a housing shortage years in the making, the state's chief economist told lawmakers Monday.

The 29,522 total is lower than [Gov. Tina Kotek's goal of building 36,000 homes per year](#), but still [well above construction in recent years](#). Builders pulled just more than 20,000 residential permits in 2022, less than 18,000 in 2023 and barely more than 13,000 by November of 2024, the most recent month data is available.

The state's analysis includes five factors contributing to housing needs:

1. Years of underproduction
2. Rehousing homeless people
3. Population growth
4. Demographic change
5. Making up for homes lost as short-term rentals or vacation homes

CRIME

[Oregon council greenlights cameras to combat crime, funded by federal grant](#)

WTOL Toledo | Andre Norrils

Oregon is set to install 12 Flock cameras in the coming months following a unanimous vote by the city council Monday night.

The cameras will not monitor speeding or red-light violations. Instead, the system uses license plate reading technology to flag stolen vehicles, individuals with outstanding warrants and other law enforcement concerns, like amber alerts.

HEALTH CARE

[How Oregon researchers are developing a "one and done" flu vaccine](#)

Axios / By Meira Gebel

Researchers at Oregon Health & Science University are working on a novel approach to influenza vaccination that could provide broad protection against multiple strains — including [the H5N1 bird flu virus](#) — without the yearly injection.

A universal flu vaccine is still years away, but the ongoing evolution of worrisome strains serves as a reminder to Sacha of "the holy grail we're chasing."