

## **Oregon News**

### **POLITICS**

#### **Lawmakers consider permanent funding for helpline for farmers, loggers and fishermen**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Lynne Terry*

The AgriStress helpline, which launched in Oregon in September 2023, is geared toward people in those industries, offering a safe option to those who ordinarily might not seek help.

[Senate Bill 779](#), sponsored by Levy and a fellow Republican rancher, state **Sen. Todd Nash of Enterprise**, would allocate \$2 million to a helpline endowment, the Rural Mental Health Fund, which is housed in the Oregon State University Foundation. The endowment earns 4% interest, enough to keep the line operating as long as it was needed, supporters said.

Since its launch, specialists have handled more than 50 calls and texts from farmers, fishermen, loggers and foresters in 28 Oregon counties. Though that might not seem like much, Allison Myers, an OSU extension associate dean and lead supporter of the line, said studies show that every suicide can affect 130 people and can be devastating in small communities. And each call can prevent that from happening.

#### **Multnomah County jails neared capacity 5 times in first two months of the year**

*The Oregonian | Maxine Bernstein*

Multnomah County jails [nearly reached capacity](#) on five days in the last two months, with yellow alert warnings signaling the 90% capacity threshold had been reached.

Sheriff Nicole Morrissey O'Donnell said the jails, now funded to staff 1,130 beds, are holding more people with more serious charges.

Contributing factors include changes that took effect in January governing who must remain in custody before arraignment, the lack of available public defenders and an increasing number of people booked on violent crimes, according to Morrissey O'Donnell.

#### **Southern Oregon farmers and ranchers hit by federal funding freeze**

*OPB | By Juliet Grable*

The biggest struggle for small farmers and ranchers in this region is staying profitable, says Maud Powell, assistant professor at OSU Extension's Small Farms Program. Sales increased for some producers last year, but those gains were offset by the rising cost of inputs like equipment, fuels and fertilizers, says Powell. "So the profitability is actually lower than it has been in the past, even though the markets are increasing."

Federal conservation programs are offered through the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS. These popular programs help farmers implement practices that are better for the land, water, and wildlife — planting cover crops or preserving pollinator habitat, for example. These programs can also help farmers save costs or boost income. The ["high tunnel" initiative](#), for instance, helps growers install hoop houses so they can extend the season.

Federal conservation programs are typically funded through the Farm Bill, but starting in 2023, several received a significant boost of funding from the Inflation Reduction Act. Some of the new funding was used to hire more county agents, who work one-on-one with producers, helping them navigate grant applications and implement practices on the ground.

The funding freeze has plunged thousands of producers like Choplin into uncertainty — and in some cases, debt, says Jesse Womack, policy specialist at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

"These programs by and large don't hand out money to farmers upfront. [Producers] are being told that they might not be reimbursed for expenses they've already incurred."

#### **Oregon House Republicans want accountability after ODOT's \$1 billion budget forecast error**

*KOIN | By Ariel Jacobazzi*

Back in 2022, ODOT said when they were working out the budget for 2023-25, they accidentally forecasted about \$6.9 billion. That's \$1 billion more from the federal government than would eventually come in.

KOIN 6 News was told that so far this biennium, ODOT anticipates spending only \$5.6 billion of that forecast by moving around a few projects to be done later in the future. It has spent \$4.4 billion to date and the biennium ends this June.

"It means that projects will be delayed, but we are not going to be canceling projects," Brouwer said. Oregon Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis (R) said this is an example as to why she and others say ODOT should be held accountable and practice transparency.

#### [Editorial: Oregonians want solutions, not more partisanship](#)

*Bend Bulletin Editorial Board*

"Senate President Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, and House Speaker Julie Fahey, D-Eugene, announced that **Senator Bruce Starr, R-Dundee**, will lead the development of recommendations for an accountability proposal as a central component of the Legislature's 2025 transportation package," Wagner and Fahey announced.

"Turning to Republicans for help fixing this problem is the ultimate admission that Democrats lack the vision, creativity, and resolve to reform an agency riddled with mismanagement and misplaced priorities. But if Democrats are only looking for cover to justify another tax hike, we won't be their scapegoat. Governor Kotek's default response to every problem is to raise taxes, but Oregonians shouldn't be forced to pay more just to subsidize this agency's failures, especially when they've made it clear they can't afford more taxes," said **Senate Republican Leader Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles**. "Tapping a Republican with decades of transportation policy experience is a wise move, but only if Democrats are serious about solving this problem."

We can't fault Republicans for being suspicious. Maybe scar tissue got in the way of a more measured response. Oregonians, though, want practical solutions drawn from liberals, centrists or conservatives — wherever it comes from. They aren't picky about party. Relentless partisanship doesn't help.

#### [Defense Lawyers Scrap Decriminalization Bill, Ask Lawmakers to Give Judges More Discretion](#)

*Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss*

In 2024, lawmakers spent much of their session re-criminalizing the drugs decriminalized by Measure 110, which voters passed in 2020.

Despite that pendulum swing, the Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association this week urged the House Judiciary Committee to support legislation that would allow judges to reduce many misdemeanors to violations at the time of sentencing.

The OCDLA introduced [House Bill 2469](#), which in addition to making changes about court procedure and the use of grand jury recordings, would "authorize the court to enter a judgment for a Class A violation when a person is convicted of a misdemeanor." (A Class A violation is similar to a traffic ticket.)

While the OCDLA and prosecutors took turns arguing their differing theories of criminal justice on a series of bills, OCDLA pulled from consideration another piece of legislation scheduled for a Feb. 26 hearing. [House Bill 2640](#) would have gone farther than allowing judges discretion. Instead, the bill proposed downgrading numerous common misdemeanors, including criminal trespass, criminal mischief and theft of "basic need items" to violations. Those "basic need items" included food, water, medical supplies, tarps and tents.

#### [Listen: Oregon Secretary of State Tobias Read talks election integrity, state agency audits](#)

*KOIN*

This week, Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek allowed the DMV to resume automatic voter registration under the so-called "motor voter law."

The governor paused the practice after DMV clerical and policy mistakes resulted in more than 1,600 people making it onto voter rolls without verification of citizenship.

Newly elected Secretary of State, former State Treasurer and former state legislator Tobias Read joined this week's Eye on Northwest Politics to discuss Oregon election integrity and more.

#### **Editorial: Vega Pederson's solo act hits all the wrong notes**

*The Oregonian Editorial Board*

Nine days ago, she [stood at a podium](#) to warn the public that the county's efforts to fight homelessness are at risk. With the regional homeless services tax generating less money than expected and other budgetary constraints, Vega Pederson said the county's homeless services department [faces a "catastrophic" \\$104 million hole](#) in its 2026 fiscal year budget. Unless the state and Metro collectively chip in \$85 million, the county will be forced to close shelters, cut rent assistance and curtail other services, she said, adding ominously that "these cuts will result in increased homelessness and suffering for our community."

The unexpected announcement prompted a strong response, though probably not the one she wanted. The [governor](#), [Metro Council president](#), Portland [mayor and her fellow county commissioners](#) – who were notified of her plans just shortly before her press conference – expressed their [surprise and dismay](#), some with blistering criticism.

#### **Kotek, Peterson Pepper Vega Pederson With Questions About Gap in Homeless Budget**

*Willamette Week | By Anthony Effinger*

Instead of riding to the rescue, Gov. Tina Kotek and Metro President Lynn Peterson are pressing Vega Pederson to explain the gap, and they want receipts.

Kotek and Peterson wrote a letter to the chair Friday, requesting three years of spending—with "actual line-item detail"—at the JOHS, a partnership it runs with the city. They also want granular detail on the JOHS forecast for fiscal year 2026, which ends June 30 of next year.

#### **Oregon lawmakers introduce more than 3,300 bills in 2025**

*Statesman Journal | By Dianne Lugo*

House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, pushed back against the suggestion of bill limits, saying she is "sensitive" to the idea of "any limitations" on ideas. She referred to bill limits as an "arbitrary" limit on ideas and access for Oregonians.

Senate President Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, said in February he was of two minds on bill limits: wanting to protect free speech and the opportunity for the general public to bring ideas forward that lawmakers can introduce; and practical reality.

#### **Bill Would Create \$1 Billion Fund to Aid Utilities in Paying Wildfire Victims**

*Willamette Week | By Jeff Manning*

After a series of low-profile meetings with Salem power brokers and utility officials, state Rep. Pam Marsh (D-Ashland) confirms to the Oregon Journalism Project that she has crafted legislation to create a \$1 billion fund to help utilities pay damages to customers hurt by utility-caused wildfires.

On Tuesday, she introduced House Bill 3666, which would create a wildfire certification program. Critics charge that the bill is an attempt by utilities to shield themselves from wildfire-related lawsuits by pointing to their state certification as evidence they did all they could to prevent conflagration.

#### **Oregon's semiconductor industry regroups amid job losses, falling sales and political setbacks**

*Oregon Live | By Mike Rogoway*

Oregon chipmakers seemed to have the wind at their back when Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo toured a science education lab in Hillsboro just two years ago.

State lawmakers were on the verge of approving more than \$500 million in incentives for the semiconductor industry, including tax breaks for research, money for workforce training and direct subsidies to Oregon chip manufacturers.

It seems like nothing has gone well since then.

Chipmakers are shedding jobs across the Portland area. Intel is adrift amid falling sales, technological lapses and a leadership vacuum at the top. The company is openly contemplating a corporate breakup and hasn't had a permanent CEO since early December.

Gov. Tina Kotek's authority to earmark rural property for the semiconductor industry expired last year having never been used, as no chipmaker emerged seeking to build in Oregon.

While cautioning that new taxes on businesses and highly paid technology employees could drive businesses away, James said Oregon's chip industry still has the talent and experience to grow significantly.

The state Legislature passed its own chips act with hundreds of millions in state subsidies and restored a tax credit for research spending within the state. Some manufacturers, among them Analog Devices and Lam Research, are using state money to expand their Oregon factories.

#### [Tillamook County housing projects in limbo following cuts to federal funding](#)

*OPB | By Joni Land*

A shortage of available, affordable housing is a problem across Oregon. That crunch is especially pronounced in Tillamook County, and recent uncertainty about federal funding is making things worse. County officials were counting on \$3.6 million from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's Climate Equity and Resilience Through Action Grant, known as CERTA. That grant — which originally came from the federal Environmental Protection Agency — would fund housing projects that are more environmentally friendly.

Tillamook County was one of four local governments in Oregon to receive the grant. After a year of developing the projects, Sammons was getting ready to make a public announcement about the funding. But he received a surprise email two weeks ago: The federal government was freezing the funds.

#### [Kotek condemns violence after shots fired at SAIF CEO's home, urges cooperation](#)

*KATU*

Lake Oswego police on Friday released surveillance video of the person they suspect [of firing a gun at the home of the CEO of an insurance company](#) as well as a photo of a driver who they said may have information about what happened, while Gov. Tina Kotek issued a statement saying the "acts of violence" have no place in Oregon.

### **EDUCATION**

#### [Lawmakers Grill Researchers Over Call for Increased Education Spending](#)

*Willamette Week | By Joana Hou*

Factoring in more outcomes—and making costs more reflective of different schools in Oregon that have higher poverty—meant the price tag soared. In 2022–23, Oregon would have had to make up a funding gap of \$2.8 billion to catch up to AIR's numbers. That's about \$1.87 billion more than the QEM would have required: \$935 million for that year.

But the conclusion AIR reached was perplexing in the context of another informational session the Joint Ways and Means subcommittee on education heard in late January. There, legislators were presented with [education spending charts by the Edunomics Lab](#) at Georgetown University that mapped increased Oregon education spending since 2013 alongside student outcomes, which had decreased during the same period of time.

#### [Spending on special education in Oregon needs a revamped formula, researchers find](#)

*Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt*

Oregon is one of seven states that cap spending on special education, and it has the lowest cap of all, according to the Virginia-based American Institutes for Research researchers, who discussed their analysis on Oregon's education funding during a joint meeting of the House and Senate Education committees last week. Lawmakers are considering a proposal this session, [House Bill 2953](#), sponsored by Rep. Courtney Neron, D-Wilsonville, that would remove the funding cap but Oregon also needs more thoughtful spending on special education, the researchers found.

In any of Oregon's school districts, just 11% of the student body with disabilities are entitled to extra money from the state — about \$9,000 additional dollars above general per-pupil costs, per student — regardless of the type of disability the student has. In the average Oregon district, about 15% of students have disabilities and require additional resources.

The additional costs of providing a fair and equal education for a deaf or blind student are about \$24,000 annually, according to the U.S. Department of Education. For a student with autism, it's closer to \$29,000 and for a student with a speech language impairment it's about \$11,000.

But in Oregon, every student with a disability receives the same amount of additional funding under the state's funding formula. Because the state gives no special weight to funding schools based on the actual cost of the students' disability, schools have to come up with the difference.

#### [Parent's rights group files a complaint alleging race-based discrimination](#)

*Fox News | By Rachel del Guidice*

A parental rights organization is filing a civil rights complaint alleging that a school system in Oregon is discriminating on the basis of race.

The complaint alleges that Portland Public Schools is violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits educational institutions that receive federal funding from discriminating on the basis of race, color or national origin, as well as the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

#### [Oregon Reform Education Act introduced](#)

*Curry Pilot | By Jeremy C. Ruark*

**State Senator David Brock Smith** (R-Curry, Coos and Douglas Counties) and State Representative E.

Werner Reschke (R-Klamath Falls) have introduced SB 1100, described by the two as "an omnibus education bill to bring real reform to benefit students, teachers, and their families across the state."

"Oregon education continues to play for last place across the nation, even though the legislature has continued to provide more funding than ever before," Smith said. "As reported in the Oregonian on January 28th, 2025, 'Oregon fourth graders who were tested in early 2024 ranked second worst in the country in math and tied with 10 other states for third worst in reading.'"

#### **TRUMP**

#### [Trump moves to boost US timber supply and reduce construction costs](#)

*OPB | By Josh Boak*

The U.S. president signed an [executive order](#) to increase the possible supplies of timber and lumber and possibly lower housing and construction costs. The goal is to streamline the permitting process by salvaging more wood from forests and expand how much wood product can be offered for sale, according to a senior White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the actions on a call with reporters.

#### [US tariffs on Canada and Mexico to take effect at midnight](#)

*The National News Desk | By Alexx Altman-Devilbliss*

US tariffs against Canada and Mexico that were [put on hold](#) during a last-minute agreement are set to go into effect at midnight and the universal tariff charged on [imports from China](#) will double to 20%.

#### [At Gresham town hall, Rep. Dexter addresses Democrats' response to Trump amid voter calls to 'fight back'](#)

*OPB | By Joni Land*

Dexter acknowledged that many of her constituents want a more aggressive approach; her office is receiving thousands of phone calls. But she cautioned against Democrats trying to [shut down the federal government](#), which some have speculated could be a negotiating tactic against Trump's spending cuts. Dexter said she has talked with Republicans, but that it's not an easy sell.

“These are good people that want to serve their communities,” Dexter said of her Republican colleagues. “They have people in their communities who are showing up like you, and are telling them to make a courageous choice and that is what they need to do.”

**[‘If you just came here to yell, I can leave,’ Trump-supporting Oregon congressman tells crowd of angry rural voters](#)**

*Oregon Live | By Aimee Green*

Oregon’s only Republican member of Congress, Rep. Cliff Bentz, stood before a town hall of more than 400 of his constituents in deeply red eastern Oregon and faced a barrage of jeers. Many attendees were upset with the first month of cuts by the [Trump administration](#) and Elon Musk’s [Department of Government Efficiency](#), as well as Bentz’s staunch defense of them.

Bentz is one of a league of Republican representatives across the nation who received a verbal lashing in their overwhelmingly conservative districts during their first town halls since Trump retook office. The end result has left many rural Oregonians unsettled over the turmoil that’s unfolding in their communities.

**ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**

**[Oregon’s community solar program in danger of dying without changes, backers say](#)**

*Oregon Live | By Gosia Wozniacka*

Portland will soon see the launch of its first full-sized community solar project nearly a decade after the Legislature approved the statewide program to provide clean energy and help low-income ratepayers at the same time. But it may be the last one in the city unless supporters convince lawmakers to expand and improve the program, beset by delays, recalcitrant power companies and limits on capacity.

**[Southwest Eugene neighbors oppose new housing on wetlands](#)**

*OPB | By Nathan Wilk*

A developer wants to build new homes in southwest Eugene, but some neighbors there are concerned about habitat destruction.

“In the Willamette Valley, we’ve kind of unknowingly, unwittingly, greatly reduced the supply of our native oak savanna,” said Butler. “And we’re just now really becoming aware of this and the danger of losing it all.”

Butler also said the wetland reduces flooding and fire risk for neighbors, and filters water flowing into Videra Creek, which wildlife drink from. She said this housing proposal could disrupt that natural environment.

**[Oregon’s 4 National Weather Service offices lose 25% to 60% of staff in Trump cuts, state climatologist says](#)**

*Tribune News Service*

Oregon has a total of four National Weather Service offices, each staffed by 20 to 25 people. Each office lost between 25% to 60% of their staff, said O’Neil. The job losses are part of the federal government’s effort to cut costs and reduce spending nationwide.