

## **Oregon News**

### **POLITICS**

#### **Oregon budget writers plan to spend hundreds of millions more on health, social services**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle* | By Julia Shumway

Citing higher-than-anticipated caseloads in the state's Medicaid program and the agency that provides services to seniors and people with disabilities, Oregon's budget writers plan to spend nearly \$426 million more than they initially budgeted before the end of the fiscal year in June.

The new spending is detailed in a set of amendments to five bills — Senate Bills [5550](#), [5049](#), [5050](#), [5051](#) and [10](#) — released Wednesday afternoon. They're part of a routine "budget rebalance," which the Legislature does before the end of each two-year budget.

#### **Oregon Democrats propose major new spending as part of budget 'rebalance'**

*OPB* | By Dirk Vanderhardt

Oregon Democrats are proposing more than \$425 million in new spending in order to help the state address rising social services caseloads, prepare for wildfires, and more.

The new allotments were unveiled Wednesday as part of a package of bills that make up an early-session budget "rebalance" — a way for the state to reconcile increased costs and balance the books in the current two-year budget before it expires on June 30.

The bulk of the new spending is aimed at the Oregon Health Authority and Department of Human Services, which both report a higher demand for services than anticipated two years ago.

#### **Oregon bill would allow immigrants to rent homes without providing proof of citizenship**

*Oregon Live* | By Aimee Green

Under [Senate Bill 599](#), Oregon would join at least four other states —

[Washington](#), [California](#), [Illinois](#) and [New York](#) — that have said access to rental housing shouldn't be contingent on whether a person was born or naturalized into the U.S. The Portland City Council approved [a similar law in 2019](#), backers note.

Seventeen senators and representatives are sponsoring the bill. All are Democrats. It's also the top priority bill of the Legislature's Black, Indigenous, People of Color Caucus, also known as [the BIPOC Caucus](#). It's gained support from more than a dozen advocacy groups, religious organizations and unions representing hundreds of thousands of workers, including the Oregon Education Association and Oregon AFL-CIO.

But it also has drawn significant opposition from people concerned that it would infringe on landlord rights, it would intensify competition for housing by making it easier for immigrants to rent and that the Legislature should focus on lowering rents for citizens rather than establishing protections for immigrants who entered the country without documentation.

#### **Oregon tire tax proposal hits wall of opposition**

*OPB* | By Dirk Vanderhardt

A proposal to slap a 4% tax on many tire sales in the state has garnered overwhelming pushback by opponents in recent days, many of whom say they can't afford another cost increase and question the spending priorities of legislative Democrats.

As of Wednesday morning, more than 1,600 pieces of written testimony had been submitted in opposition to the bill, House Bill 3362, compared to around 240 in support. That outpouring followed calls by some [Republican lawmakers](#) and [conservative media](#) to fight the bill in the last week.

#### **1 in 5 Oregon State Capitol workers faced harassment or discrimination, survey says**

*OPB* | By Bryce Dole

About one in five people working in the Oregon State Capitol say they have faced discrimination or harassment in the past five years.

That's according to a survey of 651 branch employees, lobbyists and legislative members at the capitol. Gallup, an opinion polling company, presented the results Wednesday to the Oregon Legislature's Joint Committee on Conduct.

"What is the definition of harassment?" **Sen. Suzanne Weber, R-Tillamook**, asked. "How are these people being harassed?"

#### [Oregon Senate votes to make T-bone the official state steak](#)

*OPB | By Kristian Foden-Vencil*

The Oregon Senate has voted to make the T-bone Oregon's official steak.

#### [Oregon lawmakers consider ban on flavored tobacco that officials say addicts children still in elementary school](#)

*Oregon Live | By Aimee Green*

A bill to make Oregon one of a small number of states that have banned the sale of flavored tobacco drew passionate support but also very personal objections during a public hearing this week. Proponents of the bill told a legislative committee that flavored tobacco "smells like candy" and addicts children as young as elementary school age while setting them on a path toward early death. But opponents argued flavored tobacco, which often is ingested through vaping or packets that are sucked on, offers adults a less harmful alternative to smoking traditional cigarettes and the problem resides with stores that violate the law by selling it to Oregonians under age 21.

Chief among the bill's opponents is **Sen. David Brock Smith, a Port Orford Republican**, who told the Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health that vaping flavored tobacco allowed him to kick a 30-year habit of smoking that was passed on to him from his dad.

"Frankly, I'm not proud of the fact that I still use a nicotine delivery system," Brock Smith said. "But that said as a 48-year-old state senator in the state of Oregon, I should darn well be able to."

#### [Oregon bill would tighten restrictions on corporate influence in medicine](#)

*Oregon Live | By Sami Edge, Kristine de Leon*

**Senate Bill 951** is the latest effort to strengthen the state's long-standing prohibitions on the corporate control of medical practices and clinics. Oregon law already requires licensed physicians hold a majority stake — at least 51% ownership — in medical practices. But supporters say more independent medical practices are partnering with private equity firms and national health care conglomerates, sidestepping existing rules.

#### [Oregon lawmakers scramble for solutions to public defender crisis](#)

*KOIN | By Anthony Kustura*

For years, Oregon has struggled with a public defender shortage, which experts say is the root cause of issues like delayed trials and overcrowded jails.

Multnomah County's jails are over 90% full, and officials have warned that any further increase in the jail population could force them to release inmates.

**House Bill 3376** would create seven district defender offices in the most overburdened counties, including Multnomah and Washington.

Another bill, **HB 2614**, would require the **Oregon Public Defense Commission** to study improvements to the public defense system and report findings to lawmakers by next year.

#### [Oregon farm groups seek narrower landowner liability bill](#)

*Capital Press | By Mateusz Perkowski*

Agriculture groups are urging Oregon lawmakers to alter a bill that would increase landowner liabilities for farmworker housing violations to focus specifically on illicit cannabis production. Supporters of House Bill 3194 say it's meant to discourage unlawful marijuana and hemp cultivation by holding landowners jointly liable along with operators for unregistered labor camps.

Landowners have been let "off the hook" too frequently when illegal cannabis is grown on their property and HB 3194 would ensure they are "part of the equation," she said.

### [Clackamas County Commissioner indicted on 8 felony counts](#)

*OPB | By Conrad Wilson*

Newly-elected Clackamas County Commissioner Melissa Fireside was indicted on eight felony counts for stealing thousands of dollars from an 83-year-old man, according to court documents unsealed Wednesday.

### [Federal firings hit one of the Oregon coast's most popular attractions](#)

*Oregon Live | By Jamie Hale*

Home of the Yaquina Head Lighthouse ([the tallest lighthouse in Oregon](#)), as well as a pristine marine habitat and a popular visitor center, the coastal park site managed by the Bureau of Land Management is suddenly under duress after [federal layoffs](#) culled a third of its staff.

### [Portland settles claims of police force against journalists, legal observers from 2020 protests](#)

*OPB | by Troy Brynerson*

The city of Portland has agreed to settle a lawsuit from journalists and legal volunteers who were injured by police during the city's marathon of racial justice protests in 2020.

Portland City Council on Wednesday voted 11-1 to pay \$938,328 to the plaintiffs, which includes several reporters who covered the nightly protests that lasted more than 100 days and drew nationwide attention. There were nine plaintiffs total, including legal observers who volunteer to watch and gather information during the demonstrations.

The settlement also requires Portland Police Bureau to include clearer protections for journalists and legal observers in their policy manual until Dec. 31, 2028.

## **EDUCATION**

### [Listen: A look at the key education bills in the Oregon Legislature](#)

*OPB | BY Gemma DiCarlo*

Oregon lawmakers are [once again debating](#) how best to allocate education funding to improve K-12 attendance, graduation rates, test scores and other key metrics of success. Meanwhile, parents and educators are [pushing to remove restrictions](#) on the amount of money school districts can receive for students with special needs. Lawmakers are also considering a bill [that nearly passed last year](#) that would [block schools from removing](#) certain books from libraries and classrooms.

### [Gov. Kotek's diagnosis for schools: More accountability, not more money](#)

*Oregon Live | By Julia Silverman*

"I've been really clear with people: don't talk to me about more money," Kotek, who has proposed spending [\\$11.3 billion](#) for schools over the next two years, roughly an 11% increase over current funding, told The Oregonian/OregonLive in an interview this week. "We have to make sure that we are getting better outcomes with the resources we have."

Oregon spent an average of about \$17,200 per pupil in state and local dollars per pupil in the 2022-2023 school year, [according to the state Department of Education](#), which puts the state "[in the middle of the pack, nationally](#)," Kotek noted. But on virtually every metric — from reading and math test scores to chronic absenteeism to high school graduation rates — the state's students currently rank [at the bottom of the national barrel](#).

### [Should Oregon change the way it funds public schools? A new study says 'Yes'](#)

*OPB | By Natalie Pate*

School districts all over the state are facing millions of dollars in budget cuts this spring — including [\\$40 million in Portland](#) and [\\$25 million in Eugene](#) — on the heels of deep cuts last year. Financial pressures fueled recent teacher strikes in Albany and Portland.

Is the problem that Oregon doesn't spend enough on schools, or is it that schools aren't spending the money in the right way? The answer, according to a new landmark study, is "yes."

Staff from the [American Institutes for Research](#) presented their findings to state lawmakers last Wednesday. AIR is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research group headquartered in Virginia.

Their big takeaway is that Oregon has to spend significantly more money to get higher academic outcomes, *and* it needs to be smarter about how schools spend that money in order to get the kind of outcomes they want. The researchers suggest things like eliminating the state's special education funding cap and factoring in different costs for more rural districts in Eastern Oregon.

#### [Portland Teachers' Union Walks Out to Protest Federal Administration Policies, Local Cuts](#)

*Willamette Week* / By Joanna Hou

Portland Association of Teachers members across Portland Public Schools participated in a nationwide walkout on Tuesday to protest the Trump administration's education policy—and criticize local budget cuts.

They joined a nationwide campaign by the National Education Association, the nationwide teachers' union, that encouraged members to "March Fourth" for education on Tuesday. The march followed the recent confirmation of U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon and President Donald Trump's talk of dismantling the U.S. Department of Education.

#### **TRUMP**

#### [How many Trump job cuts in Oregon? What will happen to fired federal employees? A scramble for answers](#)

*Oregon Live* / By Yesenia Amaro

While the full scope of cuts in Oregon is not yet known, the impacts on workers who have lost their jobs and what the job losses will mean for Oregonians are slowly coming into focus – with the potential to disrupt services for veterans, jeopardize assistance for farmers and ranchers, and [strain oversight](#) of the region's energy grid, among other things.

About 29,700 federal employees worked in Oregon as of last spring, representing about 1.5% of all employees statewide, which is among the lowest rates in the country, federal data shows. It's unclear how many have voluntarily left their jobs or been forced out, although Oregon had about 4,700 federal workers who were still in probationary periods last August.

#### [4 charts that explain how Trump's federal job cuts could hurt Oregon](#)

*Oregon Live* / By Ted Sickinger

Federal employees – there are about 29,700 in Oregon – comprise about 1.5% of all 2,000,000 workers statewide. Oregon is among the states that are least dependent on federal jobs. Only twelve states have smaller percentages of federal workers, although their rates are fairly close to Oregon's.

As the graphic shows, rural Oregon, and counties east of the Cascades, are far more dependent on federal jobs than their more diversified and urban counterparts in the Willamette Valley.

In Wasco County, where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bonneville Power Administration operate dams and high-voltage transmission infrastructure, the average federal wage is double the average for all jobs. In Yamhill County (think Federal Correctional Institute - Sheridan), the federal average of \$108,524 is 98% higher than the average for all jobs. In Lincoln County, where the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and U.S. Forest Service both have sizable employee bases, federal employees' wages are 88% better than average.

#### [Trump's timber directives could sway Oregon forest policy, but market effects remain unclear](#)

*OPB* / By April Ehrlich

Republican-led policy directives could rewrite forest policies that affect public lands in Oregon and the rest of the West.

New executive orders from the Trump administration [last weekend](#) call on federal agencies to fast-track logging projects by circumventing endangered species laws, and to investigate whether lumber imports threaten national security. These directives could influence separate logging policies that are currently in the works.

Among those prospective policies is the Fix Our Forests Act, which is set for hearing in the U.S. Senate on Thursday. The bill would allow agencies to fast-track logging projects that are intended to reduce wildfire fuels.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **[Oregon Senate votes to ban toxic 'forever chemicals' in firefighting foam](#)**

*Oregon Capital Chronicle* | By Alex Baumhardt

Efforts to get harmful “forever chemicals” out of firefighting foam used in Oregon are closer to being realized.

The state Senate voted nearly unanimously Tuesday to pass [Senate Bill 91](#) and ban perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, from firefighting foam used on the ground by firefighters. A vote in the House of Representatives has not yet been scheduled, but if passed, it would make Oregon the 16th state to essentially outlaw PFAS-laden firefighting foam.

PFAS are human-made chemical chains that do not break down or go away naturally but instead have for decades leached into rivers and streams and contaminated water supplies.

### **[Oregon once again has access to more than \\$450 million in federal climate funds](#)**

*OPB* | By Monica Samayoa

Oregon again has access to more than \$450 million in federal funds awarded to two state agencies for climate action programs, after a confusing period in which the Trump administration repeatedly froze payments.