

SOU in Salem – Notes from the Capitol v. 2026, ed. 3

A politician needs the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month, and next year. And to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn't happen. - Winston Churchill

Big News:

- **New Trustees Confirmed by Oregon Senate** – Peter Buckley and Chris Geryak were confirmed on Tuesday by the full State Senate to serve on the SOU Board of Trustees. Chris attended his confirmation hearing in person in Salem and had the opportunity to meet Senator Jeff Golden (D-Ashland), who serves on the Rules Committee, for the first time on Monday morning.
- **“Disconnect Bill” Approved by State Senate** - The Oregon Senate approved on Tuesday SB 1507 by a 17-13 vote. This bill “disconnects” Oregon from some of the tax cuts and provisions in the federal tax code recently adopted by Congress, while expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit and creating a new “Jobs Tax Credit”—both aimed at helping working families. Sen. Mark Meek (D-Oregon City) voted against a Republican version of this bill (which failed 12-18), while also opposing the final version offered by Democratic leadership, which passed on a 17-13 vote. The House will now consider this bill. The importance of the bill is that it will further reduce the potential budget gap the state is facing by up to \$150 million.
- **One-Day Walkout** – Senate Republicans, in a recall of past sessions, walked out of the business of the Senate earlier this week, in protest of plans to move the date of the referendum on the Transportation Package passed in the 2025 Special Session from November to May. Republicans have accused Democrats of “playing politics” with the referendum, seeking a “better date” for this vote that would not incur a large Republican voter turnout, while Democrats noted that they had sought to repeal the package altogether, but Republicans obtained a ruling that a vote could not be cancelled.

The Little Things:

- **Making a motion doesn't meet you will support it:** Senate Republican Leader Bruce Starr (Dundee), who serves as vice-chair of the Senate Rules Committee, made the motion to approve the slate of appointments submitted by Governor Kotek; something which is typically done by the vice-chair. He then proceeded to vote against his own motion, along with the other Republican serving on the panel, Senator Kim Thatcher (Keizer).
- **Evans Resigns Leadership Post** – Rep. Paul Evans (D-Monmouth) resigned his post as Assistant Majority Leader, over disagreements with House Speaker Julie Fahey (D-Eugene). Among the disagreements, Rep. Evans has strongly resisted efforts to limit the number of bills that can be introduced by a legislator.
- **Avel Gordly Tributes** - Notwithstanding the walkout this week, Senators displayed on Tuesday their capacity to come together across party lines, by offering bipartisan tributes to former Senator Avel Gordly, who was the first Black woman to serve in the Oregon Senate. President Wagner offered equal opportunities for Democrats and Republicans who had served with Senator Gordly; Senator Starr was the first to speak.
- **Past the Halfway Mark** – The 2026 Session passed the halfway mark on Wednesday evening. Session will adjourn on March 9.

Bills of Interest:

- [SB 1507A](#)-Targeted Changes to Oregon's Tax Code to support working families (disconnecting from federal provisions) – passed the Senate 17-3. The bill is currently being worked on in the House Revenue Committee.

- [SB 1512](#)-Prosperity 10,000 Workforce Program Expansion – passed the Senate 27-2; scheduled for a hearing and work session in House Labor and Workforce Development Committee on Feb 23.
- [SB 1538A](#)-Promoting Early Literacy for School-Age Children – passed the Senate 13-7; public hearing scheduled in House Education Committee on Feb 23. (Note- there was a late amendment introduced that would allow community colleges that were in existence prior to 1970 and that used a name that did not include the words “community college” to be able to apply to use that name. This would apply to Central Oregon Community College (formerly “Central Oregon College” and Southwestern Oregon Community College (formerly “Southwestern Oregon College”))
- [SB 1547A](#)-Creating a new licensed discipline of behavioral health and wellness practitioner – passed the Senate 27-2; will be considered by the full Senate next week.
- [HB 4060](#)-Fluorescent Light Bill – passed the House 45-0; scheduled for a public hearing and work session in the House Energy and Environment Committee on Feb 25
- [HB 4079A](#)-Safeguarding students and families during immigration enforcement – passed the House 35-22; scheduled for a public hearing in the House Education Committee on Feb 24.
- [HB 4084A](#)-Fast Tracking the creation of “Enterprise Zones” - To be scheduled for a House vote next week.
- [HB 4124A](#)-Directing HECC to study or contract for a study to recommend an optimal structure for post-secondary institutions and affordability (Marsh Bill) – Scheduled for a work session in the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education on Feb 24.
- [HB 4138](#)-Requiring Law Enforcement officials to be identifiable – Scheduled for a vote in the full House on Feb 23.

Things to consider:

- What is important about having an independent regional university in southern Oregon? What are the critical elements of any “future state” for SOU?

What we are especially focused on:

- Supporting communications efforts around our current financial situation and future state
- Bridging with Governor’s Office and key legislative leaders and staying connected

(New) Mantra:

FIGHT TOGETHER - WIN TOGETHER– RAIDER LOVE!