

Kitzhaber scandal, mass shooting top Ore. stories

By Steven Dubois
Associated Press

PORTLAND (AP) — Gov. John Kitzhaber's unprecedented fourth term turned into an unprecedented short term, and his abrupt February resignation was selected Oregon's story of the year in the annual vote conducted by The Associated Press.

Every editor or news director who submitted a ballot of 10 top stories had the governor's downfall as either the biggest or second-biggest story of 2015. Those who didn't put Kitzhaber in the top spot chose the massacre at Umpqua Community College, which finished in second place, just ahead of the legalization of recreational pot.

Those were the only stories named on every ballot as editors went all over the map with their remaining picks. Reflecting the variety of opinions, the three stories that just missed the top 10 included the rollout of Common Core-aligned testing, the Portland Timbers winning the Major League Soccer championship and — of course! — the improbable stardom of the Portland International Airport carpet.

Here are 2015's top 10 stories:

1: Governor resigns: Just weeks after being sworn in for his fourth term, Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber surrendered to political pressure and quit over allegations his live-in fiancée, Cylvia Hayes, used their relationship to win contracts for her consulting business and failed to report the income on her taxes.

Federal agents launched a criminal investigation in February, but no charges had been filed as 2015 drew to a close. Kitzhaber has denied wrongdoing. Secretary of State Kate Brown assumed Oregon's highest office after Kitzhaber ended his four-decade political career.

2: College shooting: A 26-year-old gunman opened fire at Umpqua Community College, fatally shooting nine people before killing himself. The Oct. 1 attack shattered the Roseburg community and immediately reignited national debates about gun violence, school safety, mental health and media coverage. President Obama lamented that mass shootings and the reaction to them have become "routine." He visited the timber town to meet privately with grieving families, ignoring protests from gun-rights activists.

3: Marijuana legalization: The decision by Oregon voters to approve recreational marijuana was last year's No. 1 story. The process of putting legalization into practice remained a major topic throughout 2015. The highlight day was Oct. 1, when medical pot dispensaries began selling to recreational users over 21. Some shops opened at midnight, giving away free food and T-shirts, and offering discounted marijuana.

4: Drought: Last winter saw a dreadfully low snowpack, and the continuing dry weather led Gov. Kate Brown to declare drought emergencies for more than two dozen counties. Record December precipitation that triggered

flooding and landslides eased the drought, with much of the rain and snow occurring after the ballots had been sent.

5: Houses burn: Officials and rural homeowners feared a bad wildfire season because the land was so dry. Their fears were realized in many parts of the state as flames raged through parched forests and grasslands. A lightning-sparked blaze near John Day burned 172 square miles and destroyed more than 40 homes. No Oregon wildfire since the Great Depression has destroyed more homes.

6: Public pensions: The Oregon Supreme Court ruled in April that some cuts to public-employee retirement benefits are unconstitutional, wiping out much of the savings lawmakers were trying to attain. The justices said workers were promised an annual inflation increase of up to 2 percent, and the Legislature couldn't scale it back retroactively. It was the second time in a decade the court rejected legislative efforts to curtail pension benefits already accrued.

7: Guns — background checks: Oregon legislators approved a law requiring background checks for private gun transactions. The law requires gun buyers and sellers who aren't related to visit a licensed gun dealer who can run a background check. Republicans opposed the measure, saying it would burden gun owners who are committed to following the

law without changing the behavior of people willing to break it.

8: Oregon Ducks football: Heisman winner Marcus Mariota led the University of Oregon to the first College Football Playoff national championship game, but dreams of bringing a national title back to Eugene crumbled in a 42-20 loss to Ohio State. Mariota passed for two touchdowns, but the Ducks were held to their lowest point total of the season.

9: Port of Portland: Two major shipping companies stopped serving the Port of Portland amid labor turmoil. Hanjin and Hapag-Lloyd, which represented more than 90 percent of container traffic at the port, said their move was based on low productivity. Businesses that relied on the container terminal for international shipping are now paying more to send their goods to out-of-state ports via truck or rail.

10: Drilling protest: Greenpeace activists rappelled off Portland's St. Johns Bridge this summer in a dramatic attempt to stop a Royal Dutch Shell icebreaker from leaving the city to join an Arctic drilling operation. The vessel eventually threaded its way past the dangling demonstrators. But late in September, Shell announced it was ending further exploration in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas because of disappointing results from an exploratory well.

Canadian co. plans 10-megawatt solar farm in Oregon

BEND (AP) — A Canadian renewable energy company is planning to create a solar farm in Oregon.

The Bend Bulletin reports that Saturn Power Corp. of New Hamburg, Ontario, submitted a permit application to Deschutes County in November for a nearly 10-megawatt facility near Redmond.

The plant could potentially generate enough power for about 1,500 homes a year.

County planners have requested more information from Saturn Corp. before they can consider the application complete. The company is expected to submit additions by early January.

Klamath Falls-based environmental consultant Andrea Rabe says Saturn Corp. has several renewable energy facilities in Canada, the United States and Turkey.

The application says the land was developed for agriculture but not productive because of "marginal soils."

Two similar solar farms have been approved east of Bend.

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