

Biden touts \$1 trillion infrastructure program

President stopped briefly in Portland and then headed to Seattle for a two-city West Coast tour promoting infrastructure spending

By **PETER WONG** and **JONATHAN HOUSE**
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PORTLAND — President Joe Biden led a political pep rally Thursday, April 21, at Portland International Airport, which he called “a perfect example” of what the \$1 trillion legislation he signed last year can do to overhaul the nation’s aging infrastructure.

The airport already is undergoing a \$2 billion modernization project, including a greatly expanded passenger terminal and a new mass timber roof that will be its crown jewel. The airport already has benefited from \$19 million in federal funds for runway work.

As Biden spoke to a crowd of elected officials and union workers inside a hangar at the Air National Guard base on the airport’s southern edge, the airport was visible through the hangar’s open door.

Biden thanked Oregon’s two senators and four of its five representatives — all Democrats — for their votes for the bill he signed on Nov. 15, 2021. (Oregon’s lone Republican in the House voted against it.)

“I want to thank them for helping prove that America can do big things again,” he said.

Although some in Oregon’s congressional delegation talked about other big projects that could benefit from the new fed-



Jonathan House/Oregon Capital Bureau
President Joe Biden made remarks in Portland on Thursday, April 21, 2022, on a two-city West Coast tour to promote his infrastructure spending bill, which he signed last year.

eral money — replacement bridges across the Columbia River connecting Portland and Vancouver, Washington, and the widening of Interstate 5 at the Rose Quarter interchange with Interstate 84 — Biden made no specific commitments.

He did say that \$25 billion of the new money is earmarked for airports such as Portland, which sees 20 million passages annually and ships 330,000 metric tons of goods.

According to World Economic Forum reports, the United States now ranks 13th in the quality of its infrastructure. Biden said the legislation is a start in changing that.

“Here’s the deal: It’s been much too long since America has invested in our own airports, our ports and our rails. We haven’t

done it,” he said.

“We used to have the best infrastructure in the world. We stopped investing in ourselves. We stopped investing in our communities. We stopped investing in America. I know people are tired of hearing me say it. But this time, we are going to lead the world in investing in ourselves, in our nation and in our people. That is the place to start.”

What Oregon gets

Oregon will get at least \$4.5 billion over five years, though much of that amount is in the form of renewed federal aid for highways. But at least \$1.2 billion is new money for road and bridge repairs, mass transit and other alternatives to reduce carbon emissions from cars,

safer streets and roads, infrastructure for electric vehicles, and resilience from natural disasters and climate change. Most of this money is channeled through the Oregon Department of Transportation, but some goes directly to local governments.

Oregon also has the opportunity to compete for shares of \$100 billion for projects determined by the U.S. secretary of transportation, such as the I-5 bridge and the I-5 widening mentioned above.

Biden, in a Jan. 14 video message, did mention the I-5 bridge replacement as one of three examples of bridges that could benefit from the legislation. That project is undergoing a supplemental environmental impact statement, which is required for projects likely to have a signif-

icant effect as defined in a 1970 law.

Oregon also will get aid for upgrades of water and sewer lines and expansion of broadband capacity. Leah Horner has been named by Gov. Kate Brown to oversee infrastructure spending.

The law’s effects

Biden has given similar speeches elsewhere, trying to marshal support for Democrats as they face a tough mid-term election Nov. 8, when their tenuous majorities might fall to Republicans.

Biden was introduced by Lauren Heitzman, who had several jobs before she became an apprentice electrician with Local 48 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. She was raised by a single mother; she said they were not poor, but economic insecurities plagued them.

“To me, not only is this project a symbol of modern advancement and ingenuity, it is a vehicle for a promise of a better life,” said Heitzman, one of the workers on the airport modernization. “This airport is a landmark. I will forever drive by it and see it as a symbol of how far I have come. Projects like this change lives and keep Oregon moving forward.”

“I have health care, I have a pension, I have the security of good pay — and with the extra income, I can take my mom grocery shopping whenever she wants.”

But Heitzman also said the new law and the ensuing work that it funds have a broader effect.

“The law that passed last year is not just an investment in infrastructure. It is also an investment in good union jobs, good schools and strong communities. It is an investment in me and my union,” she said.

Oregon gas prices steady

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
The Oregonian

SALEM — After a few weeks of gradual decline, Oregon’s gas prices are holding steady, as crude oil prices rise and demand for gasoline pushes costs upward, according to AAA.

The average price per gallon in Oregon this week is \$4.66, a 1-cent increase over last week. In Portland, prices were unchanged from a week earlier at about \$4.74. The national average also increased by 1 cent, and is now at \$4.10.

The average price in Bend also increased 1 cent, to \$4.68 a gallon for regular.

Prices this week remained below the record highs set last month. Gas prices nationwide and in Oregon peaked on March 11; Oregon hit \$4.74 a gallon and the United States reached \$4.33. Portland broke its record on

March 27, cresting at \$4.79 per gallon.

But as gas prices fall from those record highs, demand for fuel is increasing again, said AAA spokesperson Marie Dodds in a written statement.

“We tend to see gasoline consumption increase this time of year, as the days get longer and people drive more,” Dodds said. “But these lower pump prices could be temporary if the global price of oil increases due to constrained supply.”

Nationally, Oregon’s gas prices remain among the highest, behind only California, Nevada, Hawaii and Washington.

In Union County, AAA reports that gas prices are at an average of \$4.63 per gallon and Wallowa County averages \$4.73 per gallon. The average price per gallon is \$4.38 in Umatilla County and \$4.62 in Baker County.

Rural Oregonians overwhelmingly snub 1850 Donation Land Act

By **MICHAEL KOHN**
The Bulletin

SALEM — In 1850, Congress passed the Donation Land Act, which granted free land to white settlers in Oregon as a way to encourage Americans to go West. The act ushered in a wave of migrants and carved Oregon up into plots of land, largely at the expense of Native American tribes.

A survey that gauged Oregonian’s perceptions on the Donation Land Act revealed that rural people view the act as unfair in larger percentages than people living in urban areas.

According to the survey, 77% of people polled in rural areas said the Donation Land Act was not fair to people who were not white. For the same question, 70% of people in urban areas also responded that the act was not fair. The percentages were even higher in Oregon’s suburbs, where 80% of people said the policy was unfair.

The online survey was conducted by the independent, nonpartisan Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. It polled 1,584 Oregonians and had a margin of error

of 1.5% to 2.5%.

Jermayne Tuckta, an archivist at the Museum at Warm Springs, finds irony in the numbers.

“It’s interesting that a lot of rural people would find this unfair because they are the ones who benefited from the Donation Land Act the most,” said Tuckta, a member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

Tuckta said the difference between rural and urban attitudes could come down to which side is more exposed to Native American issues on a daily basis. People in urban areas do not regularly see the impacts of the Land Donation Act on Native Americans, he said.

“Those in the rural areas probably often run into tribal members who are looking for places to gather edible roots,” said Tuckta. “So people in rural areas are seeing firsthand the cause and effects of what the land donation act did.”

Tuckta said Native Americans often ask permission from local landowners to dig for roots on private property, common situations that bring the two sides in direct contact.

People with HIV are our neighbors.

More than half of Oregonians with HIV live outside Portland, often in suburbs or small towns like this one.

But with today’s advances, HIV isn’t what it used to be. People with HIV are living longer, healthier lives, with the help of medication. By talking about HIV, we can support our community. Testing and early treatment protect you and your partner. Help is available if you’re HIV+.

Learn more and find free testing at endhivoregon.org

