



OVER THE ROAD, UNDERSUPPLIED



George Plaven/Capital Press

Harold Worth, an instructor and assistant manager at Western Pacific Truck School, guides Jason Nord during a driving exercise.

Driver shortage frustrates trucking industry, agricultural producers

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Jason Nord poked his head out the window of a hulking Freightliner 18-wheeler as he practiced backing the rig between rows of orange cones at the Western Pacific Truck School in Portland.

The exercise required the rookie driver to use skillful maneuvers to coax the truck and its trailer into a slot that simulated a warehouse loading dock. One by one, students took their turn behind the wheel while instructors on the ground offered guidance.

After previously working in construction,

Nord, 41, said he can make more money as a trucker. He enrolled in the school to get the hands-on experience and training necessary to apply for his commercial driver's license.

"Everybody knows we're short truck drivers," Nord said of the industry.

For years, the trucking industry has suffered a debilitating shortage of drivers. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, that shortage has mushroomed into a crisis. The American Trucking Association estimates the driver shortage peaked this year at 81,000 — up from 51,000 pre-pandemic.

With fewer trucks on the road and port bottlenecks plaguing the supply chain, agricultural producers and exporters face spiraling transportation costs.

Sara Arsenault, director of federal policy at the California Farm Bureau, said exports that once cost \$2,500 to \$5,000 per container to ship overseas are now \$12,000 to \$30,000 per container. Increasingly, agricultural exports are being left behind as ocean carriers send empty containers back to Asia, where they are



Sara Arsenault

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Oregon petroleum phase-out scrapped

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon lawmakers have scrapped a proposal to phase out petroleum diesel and have instead moved ahead with a bill to study the alternative fuel supply and pricing.

The original version of HB 4141 would have prohibited the sale of petroleum diesel for motor vehicles, beginning with the Portland metropolitan area in 2025 and 2026 and then Western Oregon in 2027 and 2028.

WITHOUT ADEQUATE DIESEL SUPPLIES, OREGON'S 22,000 LOGGING OPERATORS WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO POWER THEIR EQUIPMENT OR TRANSPORT TIMBER TO MARKET.

The fuel would have been banned for motor vehicles statewide in 2029, though enforcement could be suspended due to price hikes and supply shortages.

On Feb. 22, the Joint Transportation Committee instead unanimously passed an amended bill that would create a task force to analyze the difference in availability and price of petroleum die-

sel compared to renewable diesel, as well as potential incentives to boost the alternative fuel.

"I guess it's time to sit around the campfire and sing, 'Kumbaya,'" said Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, who requested the amendment.

The amended bill will help determine the truth about renewable diesel availability and poten-

tially allow lawmakers to take action in the future, said Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth, chief sponsor of the original bill.

"There's no promise of that," Evans said.

The original legislation's goal was to promote the use of renewable diesel, which is manufactured from non-petroleum sources, but critics claimed it would severely

disrupt the supply chain.

"By all accounts, production and storage capacity is not even close to making exclusive renewable diesel a viable option for motor vehicles," said Amanda Astor, forest policy manager for the Association of Oregon Loggers.

Without adequate diesel supplies, Oregon's 22,000 logging operators wouldn't be able to power their equipment or transport timber to market, she said during a recent legislative hearing.

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Oregon cannabis bills gain traction

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Bills aimed at fighting illegal marijuana are gaining traction in Oregon, where they would increase scrutiny of legal cannabis licenses and water deliveries.

New record-keeping requirements would be imposed on water sellers and haulers under House Bill 4061, which unanimously passed the House on Feb. 21 and will now be considered by the Senate Rules Committee.

The illegal production of marijuana has reached "epidemic proportions" and HB 4061 is intended to be a tool for law enforcement officers to detect water usage by

such operations, said Rep. Ken Helm, D-Beaverton, chair of the House Agriculture, Land Use and Water Committee.

"It's really hard to make laws that apply to outlaws," Helm said before the floor vote on the bill.

The bill will require water sales and delivery records to be available upon request, giving law enforcement officers a "hook" to take a closer look at suspicious transactions, he said.

Typically, water isn't hauled to farms and nurseries for irrigation, though it is hauled to livestock operations, Helm said. "We do not need to burden legitimate agriculture when we're trying to go after outlaws."

The Senate has also approved legislation to deal with the prob-

lem, Senate Bill 1564, which would allow counties to suspend new hemp licenses.

The bill aims to "hit the pause button" on the hemp industry to ensure the crop isn't disguising illegal marijuana production, said Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, chair of the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery Committee.

The original legislation would have imposed a two-year moratorium on new hemp licenses statewide and allowed the Oregon Department of Agriculture to restrict licenses based on supply and demand for the crop.

However, the problem of hemp farms camouflaging mar-

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Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

Oregon bills aimed at restricting legal hemp and marijuana licenses are making headway, as is a bill that would increase scrutiny of water deliveries to detect illegal cannabis production.

