

# Linthicum lit up after blaming tobacco taxes for black man's death

State senator stands behind 'I Can't Breathe' news release

By **AUBREY WIEBER and PARIS ACHEN**  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — State Sen. Dennis Linthicum, R-Klamath Falls, finds himself alone on a political island this week after being publicly rebuked by fellow legislators for an inflammatory statement about a police killing.

Republicans and Democrats alike condemned him for a news release he sent out criticizing a proposed tobacco tax increase by referring to the 2014 death of a black man in police custody.

Linthicum didn't respond to interview requests or written questions about the controversial news release.

On Monday as he left a committee hearing, he told Salem Reporter he wouldn't comment beyond his release.

"I think my statement was clear," he said in reference to his release titled "I CANT BREATHE."

Those were the dying words of Eric Garner as police wrestled him to the ground in New York and put him in a chokehold as they

arrested him for selling loose cigarettes. Garner died. The death incited national unrest and was viewed as an instance of police brutality against black men. Protesters began carrying "I can't breathe" signs in rallies around the country. Several NBA players, including LeBron James, wore black T-shirts with "I can't breathe" emblazoned across the front.

No officer was indicted, but nearly a year later the city settled with Garner's family, paying \$5.9 million.

Linthicum used those famous words last week not to protest police actions but to escalate his fight against a proposed increase in cigarette taxes. Gov. Kate Brown and the Oregon Health Authority are proposing to increase the tax by \$2 per pack of cigarettes. Last week, legislation was moved from the House Committee on Health Care to the House Committee on Revenue with no recommendation on how to proceed.

In his Feb. 7 release, Linthicum argued that Garner died because high tobacco taxes created a black market for cigarettes. He reasoned that if the taxes weren't as high, Garner wouldn't have been out on the street corner selling cigarettes.

"The partisan super-



AP Photo/Andrew Selsky  
**Oregon state Sen. Dennis Linthicum, R-Klamath Falls, poses in his office in the Oregon Capitol in Salem on Friday.**

majority is ramming their tobacco tax — and billions in other tax hikes — through the Legislature, and I find it disturbing," Linthicum said in the release. "Eric Garner's death shows us exactly how disproportionate and abusive state power can become."

His spokesman, Jonathan Lockwood, clarified on Monday that Linthicum also believes police brutality lead to Garner's death.

House Democrats, who received the news release minutes before a floor session Thursday, characterized the message as trivializing a man's death. State Rep. Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, condemned the language in a floor speech.

"I just want to share my feelings about how inappropriate this is, how upset I am by this and to register my disgust," she said.

"The invocation of Eric Garner's tragic death for a press release on taxes is completely abhorrent," Williamson said in a later statement. "Unequivocally, Eric Garner did not die because tobacco taxes are too high in New York. He died because law enforcement officials engaged in an act of brutality against a black man and then watched him die on a sidewalk as a direct result of their actions."

She called Linthicum's press release a "low point" and that he "owes everyone

an apology and explanation." House Republicans reacted as well.

"No purpose is served in relating a cigarette tax request to the tragic death of a man of color," spokesman Greg Stiles said in the statement on behalf of Republican representatives. "At best, the remarks are unsavory and offensive. Such a comparison is indefensible and has no place in Oregon political discourse."

The House Republicans called on Linthicum to answer questions about the remarks, disagreeing with the assertion that taxes caused Garner's death.

On Friday, 24 House Democrats wrote Linthicum, condemning his release and asking for his apology. The release noted the Legislature is working to improve its workplace culture in wake of allegations of sexual harassment. Linthicum's comments show there is more work to do, the release said.

Then his own leadership came for him.

"Senator Linthicum's recent rhetoric has no place in Oregon politics, and does not reflect the opinions or beliefs of the Oregon Senate Republicans," Senate Minority Leader Herman Baertschiger, R-Grants Pass, and Sen. Jackie Win-

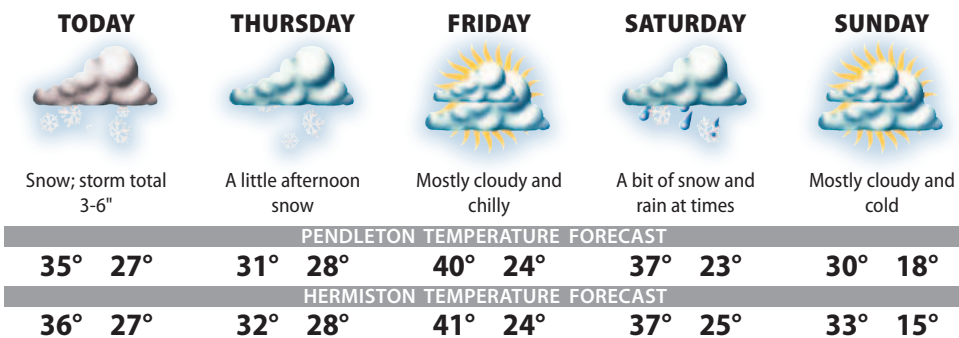
ters, R-Salem, said in a joint statement. "Using the death of a human being to make a policy statement is offensive and serves no purpose. We are deeply saddened by the death of Mr. Garner, and would like to apologize for any additional pain or suffering this may have caused."

Senate President Peter Courtney also denounced Linthicum's statements. Courtney's staff did not immediately respond to a question about whether Linthicum's committee appointments could be in jeopardy.

On Friday evening, Linthicum's office doubled down on his message.

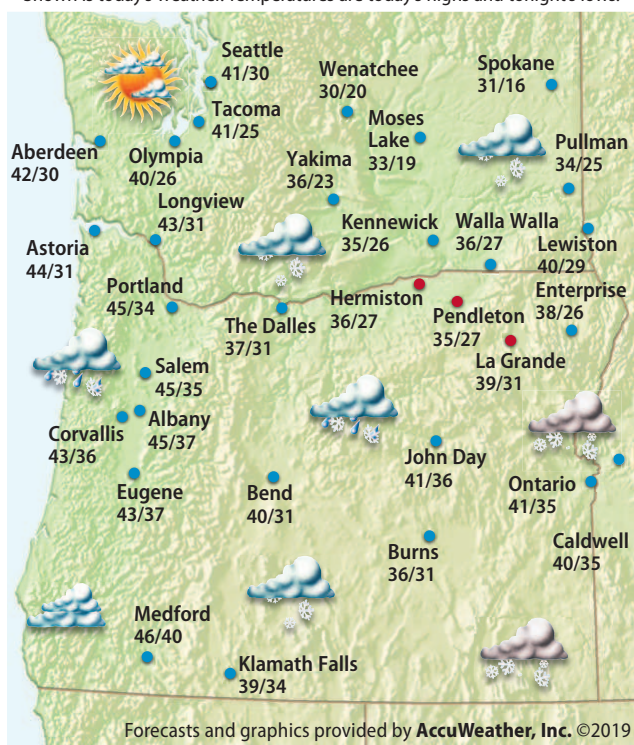
"The attempt to shut down an honest conversation about the disastrous impacts of flawed public policy and abusive power of the state is doing a disservice to Oregonians, especially for the people who are disproportionately harmed by the nexus between the two," Linthicum said in a statement defending the idea that taxes caused Garner's death. "I am welcoming a rational conversation about tax policy, and the tragedies like Eric Garner's needless death because we need to fix a broken system in our state that is hurting underprivileged communities."

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



## ALMANAC

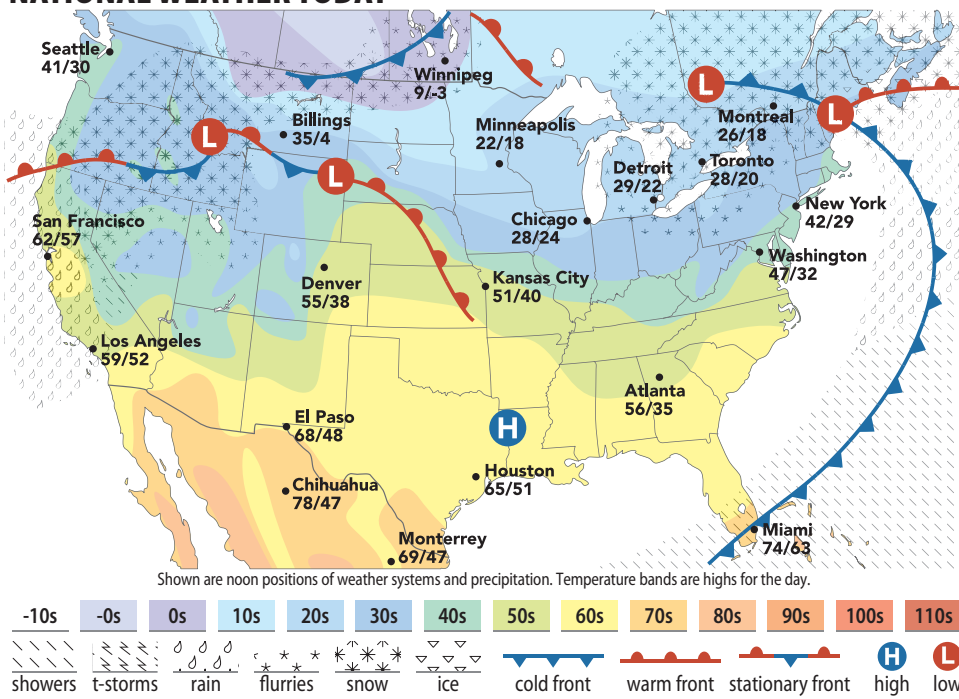
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	43°	34°
Normals	46°	29°
Records	68° (1977)	-10° (1929)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.01"	
Month to date	1.25"	
Normal month to date	0.52"	
Year to date	3.32"	
Last year to date	1.85"	
Normal year to date	1.90"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	47°	21°
Normals	47°	29°
Records	68° (2011)	-15° (1929)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.01"	
Month to date	0.94"	
Normal month to date	0.42"	
Year to date	2.47"	
Last year to date	1.24"	
Normal year to date	1.70"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	N 3-6	Thu. NNE 6-12
Boardman	N 3-6	NNE 6-12
Pendleton	WNW 4-8	NNW 6-12
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:01 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	5:18 p.m.	
Moonrise today	11:25 a.m.	
Moonset today	1:25 a.m.	

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 88° in Immokalee, Fla. Low -28° in Havre, Mont.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



# Bill aimed at protecting renters passes state Senate

SALEM (AP) — Lawmakers in the Oregon Senate approved a bill Tuesday that aims to protect home renters amid a statewide housing crisis, with the measure restricting landlords from terminating a tenancy and from imposing large rent increases.

The bill passed Tuesday with 17 in favor and 11 opposed. It now goes to the House.

Sen. Tim Knopp, a Republican from Bend, said before he voted against the measure that it doesn't address the supply issue. Oregon has a serious shortage of affordable housing.

But in testimony for a recent hearing on the bill, Bend resident Eric Lint said it is needed because rents are skyrocketing, causing multiple impacts.

He said the medical lab where he works is chronically understaffed, with

potential hires citing a lack of affordable housing in Bend, a town that has attracted droves of outdoor enthusiasts, retirees and entrepreneurs, causing a population boom.

Lint's hourly pay has risen 8 percent over five years. Meanwhile, his rent has increased 66 percent. He plans to move away in the fall.

The bill prohibits landlords from terminating month-to-month tenancy without cause after 12 months of occupancy. It also limits maximum rent increases to once per year, and to 7 percent above the annual change in the consumer price index.

It also allows landlords to terminate tenancy with 90 days written notice and payment of one month's rent, with exemptions in some cases. A landlord can refuse to renew a fixed term ten-

ancy if the tenant receives three lease violation warnings within 12 months and the landlord gives 90 days' notice.

Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Rogue Valley, told fellow senators before he voted yes that the alternative to the bill is to say: "Sorry Oregon renters, you're on your own."

The Oregon Rental Housing Association, which describes itself as the only state association whose focus is the smaller rental owner/operator, has a neutral position on the bill.

"After reviewing this bill, I believe most landlords will be able to adapt and operate within the parameters," said Jim Straub, the rental association's legislative director. He said in written testimony the proposed law protects good tenants while not encouraging landlords to leave the business and invest their money elsewhere.

# BridgePort is latest craft brewery to close

PORTLAND (AP) — BridgePort Brewery, one of Oregon's oldest craft breweries and a pioneer in the craft beer industry, will stop making its beers immediately and close its brew pub next month, it said in a Facebook post Tuesday.

The Portland institution said a continued drop in sales and distribution is forcing BridgePort to close for good. Its flagship brew pub will remain open until March 10.

The hypercompetitive craft brewery industry in Oregon and throughout the Pacific Northwest is to blame, the company said. "We would also like to thank ... our BridgePort drinkers, pub customers, and fans ... for your loyal support over the past 35 years. We invite you to stop by the pub for one last pint before we close next month," the statement read. "We would love to host you and reminisce one last time."

BridgePort was one of four initial craft breweries incorporated in Oregon in 1984. State legislation

the following year allowed breweries to sell their beer over the bar in the same place they brewed it, sparking a craft beer explosion in the state and making Oregon famous for its innovative and high-quality craft beer scene.

BridgePort is the latest in a string of Portland-area breweries to shut down in the past year, the Oregonian/OregonLive reported. Those businesses cited changing demographics, stiff competition and changing tastes as reasons for their closures.

## CORRECTIONS

The Feb. 12 article "Lodge gets new life" misstated The Lodge's address. It's 14 S.E. Third Street.  
The Feb. 8 article "PHS to build a greenhouse" attributed the wrong title for Curt Thompson. Thompson is assistant principal.

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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