

Biden touts \$1 trillion infrastructure program

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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.



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.

Although some in Oregon’s congressional delegation talked about other big projects that could benefit from the new federal 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 passengers 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 significant 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 midterm 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 has 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.

HEALTHCARE

Oregon medical providers rely on diminishing number of out-of-state nurses, study finds

By LYNNE TERRY
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — Thousands of patients in rural areas of the state might not get high quality medical care in the future if the number of out-of-state nurses practicing in Oregon continues to fall, according to a new study.

The research found that rural health care settings are the most reliant on out-of-state nurses, putting them at higher risk of a nursing shortage.

“Oregon’s smallest counties are at risk of not being able to recruit enough RNs to fill needed positions,” the study said.

The study, published earlier this month, was conducted by the Oregon Center of Nursing at the University of Portland. Jana Bitton, the center’s executive director, said the research stemmed from concern that the state does not graduate enough nurses.

“That means we’re going to be short every single year,” Bitton said.

The center has found that Oregon needs 2,500 new nurses each year to ensure that hospitals and clinics are fully staffed. But in 2020, Oregon nursing programs only graduated 1,200. The state has imported nurses from other states to fill the gap but it appears to be losing its ability to attract as many as



The Observer, File

Reunee Hays, left, looks at a hospital record Aug. 30, 2021, with fellow house supervisor Danita Thamert in the intensive care unit at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande. A new study finds the declining numbers of out-of-state nurses practicing in Oregon could jeopardize rural health care.

it needs, the study found.

Nearly 45,000 nurses practice in Oregon. Since 2012, state medical facilities have become increasingly reliant on nurses who have their out-of-state licenses endorsed by the Oregon Nursing Board, the study found. In 2020, they made up about half of the workforce. But their numbers are dropping.

“Fewer, both proportionally and numerically, endorsing RNs appeared to be practicing in the state,” the study said. That means it may become more difficult for health care companies to plug their nursing workforce gaps by drawing nurses from out of state.

If this trend continues, frontier and rural counties

would face the biggest shortages because they have the most difficulty attracting nurses educated in Oregon, the study found.

“It has a lot to do with pay,” Bitton said. “It has a lot to do with the incentives that some of our larger employers, especially those that are in the Portland area, can offer. And it also has a lot to do with the community.”

Many new graduates want to live in an urban environment, Bitton said. They also want to get their start in an acute care setting like a hospital emergency room in urban areas. Unable to hire as many Oregon graduates as they need, rural areas have become increasingly dependent on bringing in nurses.

“That is where the shortages are going to show up,” Bitton said.

The study analyzed the proportion of out-of-state nurses in hospitals and clinics. It found that two-thirds of the nurses in clinics came from out of state.

“This reliance on endorsing RNs from other states places non-hospital settings at higher risk of not (being) able to recruit enough RNs to meet staffing needs,” the study found.

The research follows legislation approved earlier this year that allows senior nursing students to practice without full licensing. While they still will be in training, they can relieve other nurses by picking up some of their duties.

Legislators also allocated \$200 million for workforce training programs for rural residents, Oregonians with low incomes and people of color among others to work in health care, technology and manufacturing.

But those measures will not guarantee that Oregon has a stable nursing workforce, Bitton said.

“There’s no one solution that’s going to actually be able to make sure that we have all the nurses that we need,” Bitton said. “It’s going to be solved by a million different little solutions to be able to get us to a stable and solid nursing workforce.”

Director of state police training agency resigns

By MAXINE
BERNSTEIN
The Oregonian

SALEM — Jerry Granderson, who the governor appointed to lead the state’s public safety certification and training agency in late March 2021, has abruptly resigned, partly over his objections to what he considered an unfair and improper evaluation of him recently by the agency’s board.

He resigned just days after he was placed on paid leave April 15, pending an

investigation by the Oregon Department of Justice into allegations against him involving alleged discrimination and creation of a hostile work environment. He denies the allegations.

“I refuse to stay on paid leave and waste the people of Oregon’s money,” he said.

Granderson, 59, told The Oregonian he submitted a letter of resignation to the governor’s office on Sunday and the following day a similar letter to the chair of the board on Public Safety Standards & Training.

In his resignation letter, Granderson cited concerns about “counseling” he received Friday from the board over his recent “Director’s evaluation,” which included a reference to the state Justice Department investigation he faced.

He strongly denied any wrongdoing, and suggested in the letter that the complaint resulted from “disgruntled employees” who in his view have resisted “fundamental changes” he has attempted to put in place at the police training and certification agency.

Granderson was disturbed that his evaluation included a board member’s reference to the investigation, particularly because it hadn’t been completed. He argued it would “preju-



Granderson

dice” his evaluation, which was set to be discussed April 28 at the board’s public quarterly meeting, before the conclusion of the Justice Department’s inquiry.

Granderson, who is Black, also wrote that he was informed there was concern among board members and staff that he was making promotions and hirings “solely based on race, gender and sexual orientation,” and “chasing out good employees.”

Granderson said he has been working to respond to a state audit about the lack of diversity in the agency and had commissioned his training administrator to research “how to ‘legally’ increase such diversity in the Training section,” given it is the least diverse at the department.

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