

Local & State

OREGON LEGISLATURE

Lawmakers poised to pass nation's first statewide rent control law

By **Andrew Selsky**
Associated Press

SALEM — Faced with a housing shortage and skyrocketing rents, Oregon is poised to become the first state to impose mandatory rent controls, with a measure establishing tenant protections moving swiftly through the Legislature.

Many residents have testified in favor of the legislation, describing anxiety and hardship as they face higher rents. Some have gone up by as much as almost 100 percent — forcing people to move, stay with friends or even live in their vehicles.

The city of Medford recently authorized churches to offer car camping for the homeless on their parking lots. Cities across the West Coast are struggling with soaring housing prices and a growing homelessness problem.

A House committee on Wednesday backed the measure, sending it to the full chamber for a vote as soon as next week. The Senate passed it last week.

"I look forward to signing the bill," Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, told reporters.

The committee rejected an amendment that would have exempted cities with populations under 150,000 and another that would have delayed

the measure from becoming law until Jan. 1, 2020, instead of immediately after Brown signs it.

"We've waited too long as it is, and there are too many people living in tents. It is an emergency," said Rep. Tawna Sanchez, a Portland Democrat and member of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing that endorsed the legislation.

Oregon's housing shortage is getting worse as people keep moving to the state, lured by its forests, mountains, coastline, relaxed lifestyle and job opportunities. Oregon ranked second to Vermont as the top moving destination in 2018, according to a study by United Van Lines, the largest U.S. household goods mover.

Lawmakers noted Oregon will be a pioneer in statewide rent control if the measure becomes law. New York has a statewide rent control law but cities can choose whether to participate.

California restricts the ability of cities to impose rent control. Last November, voters defeated a ballot initiative that would have overturned that law.

"Homelessness and affordability have no boundaries," said Rep. Mark Meek, a Democrat from a Portland suburb. "We're going to be

leading the nation now with this legislation."

Oregon's measure prohibits landlords from terminating month-to-month leases without cause after 12 months of occupancy and limits rent hikes to once per year. Those increases are limited to 7 percent above the annual change in the consumer price index.

Landlords can terminate tenancies only 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 lease if the tenant receives three lease violation warnings within 12 months and the landlord gives 90 days' notice.

The Oregon Rental Housing Association representing small-scale landlords said the measure protects good tenants while not encouraging landlords to leave the business and invest their money elsewhere.

"I believe most landlords will be able to adapt and operate within the parameters," said Jim Straub, the group's legislative director.

Eric Lint, who lives in the popular mountain town of Bend, urged lawmakers to pass the protections because of skyrocketing rents. The medical lab where he works is chronically understaffed

because potential hires say there is a lack of affordable housing.

Lint said his hourly pay has risen 8 percent over five years. Meanwhile, his rent has increased 66 percent. He plans to move away in the fall but did not say where in his testimony.

Anna Pena, a senior at the University of Oregon in Eugene who works full time, described living in a house smaller than 1,200 square feet with five roommates and spending over half her income on rent that then increased by 15 percent.

"Ultimately, housing insecurity has been one of the biggest setbacks for my education and personal health," she said.

Sen. Tim Knopp, a Republican from Bend, said before he voted against the measure last week that it does not address the housing supply issue.

Another measure aiming to deal with that issue would require cities and counties to allow duplexes and some higher-density housing in lands zoned for single-family homes.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Democrat, said 30,000 housing units must be built per year to meet the state's current housing deficit and to build for the future as more people move to Oregon.

COUNTY

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Also on Wednesday, commissioners met in an executive session, which was closed to the public, to discuss the ongoing dispute over a locked gate blocking a road in the eastern part of the county near Lookout Mountain.

Two weeks ago the county's lawyer, Larry Sullivan of Vale, filed a declaratory relief complaint in Baker County Circuit Court against the property owners Todd Longgood and Dennis Hansen. Sullivan will file an amended complaint that names Leonard Hansen

instead of Dennis Hansen, who is deceased.

The county is asking a judge to rule that the road is a public right-of-way and that the property owners must unlock the gate.

Greenhorn cemetery

The city of Greenhorn, at the far western edge of Baker County, was granted ownership of its cemetery on two conditions: that the city maintain the cemetery and the city remain incorporated.

Baker County will review maintenance to ensure it is being done. The city plans to either expand the cemetery or apply for a grant for main-

taining the cemetery.

Greenhorn is unique among the county's incorporated cities, and in a couple of ways.

It has at times had no year-round residents, although demographers put the current population at 2.

But as an incorporated city Greenhorn does have a city council, whose members live elsewhere but own property in the city.

Greenhorn also sits at the highest elevation — 6,306 feet — of any incorporated town in Oregon.

In other business

• Commissioners declared

February as Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month.

• Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said he will visit Washington, D.C., from March 1-7 to meet with officials from the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Congressmen Greg Walden's office and the National Association of Counties. The trip will cost about \$3,600, the money coming from the county budget.

Because of his trip, Harvey will miss the first commission meeting of March, scheduled for March 6.

CARBON

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"We highly encourage OTEC's member-owners come and make their voices heard at the hearing," said

Andrew Cutler, OTEC's manager of communications and public relations. "Arrive a little early, if you would like to get on the list to speak."

The Legislature's Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction has scheduled

four public hearings between Friday and March 2, in Springfield, Medford, The Dalles and Bend.

The Baker City hearing is one of two in which residents can give testimony by video. The other is in Newport.

Stormy February bolsters slim snowpack

SALEM (AP) — Winter storms that dumped snow this month have helped Oregon's snowpack recover after lower-than-normal measurements — a boon for farmers and ranchers who have endured dry conditions recently.

The entire state has seen a 20 to 30 percent bump in snowpack and two to three times the normal precipitation since Feb. 1, the Capital Press reported this week.

As of Feb. 15, Oregon's total snowpack was 93 percent of average, compared with 73 percent at the end of January and a paltry 40 percent at this time last year, said Julie Koeberle, a hydrologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service.

That is contrary to the long-term weather forecast, which called for warmer and drier conditions across the Pacific Northwest.

"I'm not sure we saw this increase coming," Koeberle said. "It was really a pleasant surprise."

A healthy snowpack helps

Oregon's ranchers and farmers who rely on melting snow from the mountains to replenish streams and rivers that feed

their irrigation systems.

Eastern Oregon is well ahead of the curve, with basins ranging between 114 and 132 percent of

snow-water equivalent, which is defined as the amount of water in snow available to replenish streams and reservoirs.

OREGON BRIEFING

Bill would require Oregon school districts to teach about Holocaust

PORTLAND (AP) — A proposed bill would require Oregon school districts to teach students about the Holocaust and other acts of genocide.

KGW-TV reports the bill, which the Senate Committee on Education is debating this week, requires the curriculum to "enable students to evaluate the morality of the Holocaust, genocide and similar acts of mass violence and to reflect on the causes of related historical events."

The bill's aim is to "develop students' respect for cultural diversity and help students gain insight into the importance of the protection of international human rights for all people."

Lake Oswego student Claire Sarnowski spoke at Holocaust survivor Alter Wiener's memorial about her friendship with Wiener, and their effort to work to get a bill requiring Holocaust education passed in the Oregon Legislature.

If passed, the bill would take effect during the 2020-21 school year.

Troubled megadairy near Boardman sold to lone bidder for \$66.7 million

SALEM (AP) — The troubled Lost Valley Farm in northern Oregon has sold to its only bidder, and its herd has been auctioned off.

The Statesman Journal reports a federal bankruptcy judge approved the dairy farm's sale to Canyon Farm LLC for \$66.7 million earlier this month.

The sale is scheduled to close March 1. The last of the dairy's approximately 8,360 cows were sold Tuesday.

The dairy's owner declared bankruptcy in April 2018, forestalling an auction of his cows as part of a bank foreclosure.

The operation was out of compliance with its wastewater permit since it opened in 2017, resulting in \$200,000 in state fines for more than 200 environmental violations.

The court-appointed trustee will ensure the dairy's wastewater lagoons are emptied to an acceptable level by the end of October.

House Republicans boycott meeting to deal with hostile work environment

SALEM (AP) — Oregon House Republicans snubbed a meeting Wednesday meant to promote an inclusive and respectful workplace environment within the state capitol.

The committee meeting was to address a perceived hostile work environment and lay out rules against discrimination, harassment and sexual misconduct.

The boycott was in response to the treatment of a lobbyist by a Democratic representative during a hearing on a bill regarding pharmaceutical pricing. Rep. Mitch Greenlick of Portland chastised a lobbyist who spoke against the bill and called him "stupid."

House Republicans say that shows Democrats aren't serious about addressing hostile behavior.

Driver who killed cyclist while driving intoxicated sentenced to 12 years

BEND (AP) — An Oregon woman was sentenced to more than 12 years in prison for hitting and killing a cyclist while driving under the influence.

KTVZ-TV reports Deschutes County Circuit Judge Michael Adler sentenced 42-year-old Shantel Witt on Tuesday, telling the court that it was the "most extreme reckless endangerment case" he had ever seen.

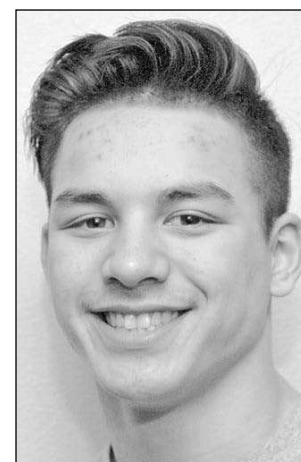
Witt was convicted earlier this month of first-degree manslaughter and other charges for the death of 38-year-old Marika Stone.

The Bend dentist was riding with two friends east of the city when Witt slammed into her in December 2017.

Prosecutors say Witt was on nearly a dozen prescription drugs, including her dog's anxiety pills, at the time of the crash.



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