

Trump fuels Democrats' anxiety at session

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau



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Left to right, Democratic Sens. Sara Gelser, Chuck Riley and Ginny Burdick talk about the mood at the Oregon Capitol on the first day of the 160-day legislative session Wednesday.

President Donald Trump was omnipresent as state lawmakers commenced their 160-day legislative session at the State Capitol Feb. 1.

Outside the Capitol, hundreds of protesters stood on the building's steps to rally against Trump's executive order last week temporarily banning refugees and visa holders from several predominantly Muslim countries

from entering the country.

Inside, state lawmakers began the process of policymaking as they face uncertainty about what policy changes could still come from the Trump administration, including a likely repeal of the Affordable Care Act and others that could affect the state's federal funding.

"My sense of it is with what is going on in Washington, D.C., especially on issues like the Affordable Care Act, there is a growing sense

that we are on our own," said Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland. "There is so much confusion back there, so much that is frankly distressing to many Oregonians going on out there that there is a sense that we need to work together."

State lawmakers this session have to contend with a \$1.8 billion revenue shortfall stemming from a reduction in federal contribution to subsidized health care for low-in-

come residents, spikes in human services caseloads and rising state pension costs. But the tone of the session largely reverberated with resistance to Trump.

In a gesture of resistance to Trump's executive order, House Speaker Tina Kotek kicked off Wednesday with an invocation from a Portland imam.

Meanwhile, on the floor of the Senate, Minority Leader Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, spoke to some Democrats'

anxiety concerning the Trump administration.

"We understand how Democrats may be feeling, especially when they look at the Washington, D.C., situation, and it's a terrible thing to be without any access to the levers of power," Ferrioli said. "We certainly know how that feels here in Oregon."

Despite the Legislature's Democratic majority, Republican votes are needed to pass tax measures, which require a three-fifths majority vote.

Oregon jobs recovery lags in some rural areas

The overall number of jobs is 6.5 percent higher than pre-recession peak

By Mateusz Perkowski
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon now has more jobs than before the "great recession" but some rural areas are still lagging behind, according to the state economist.

After the financial crisis a decade ago, Oregon lost roughly 8 percent of its jobs, said Mark McMullen, the state economist.

Since then, the state has not only regained all those lost jobs but also increased the overall number by 6.5 percent from the pre-recession peak, he said during a Feb. 6 hearing before the House Committee on Economic Development and Trade.

However, McMullen said those gains haven't been felt equally by all regions of the state.

The Portland metropolitan area has seen the strongest

recovery, with the number of jobs now 9 percent higher than before the recession.

There are now 7.5 percent more jobs in the Columbia Gorge, 6.8 percent more jobs in Central Oregon and 3.3 percent more jobs in the Willamette Valley.

Jobs in Southern Oregon contracted by roughly 12 percent during the recession but the region now has 0.3 percent more jobs than before the crisis.

Northeast Oregon and the North Coast haven't yet fully recovered, but the number of jobs is less than a half-percent lower than before the recession.

Southeast Oregon still has 4.7 percent fewer jobs from the pre-recession peak, while the South Coast has 6.1 percent fewer jobs. These regions have seen worse times, though — both have recovered roughly half the jobs they lost during the recession.

Some counties are still seriously reeling from the downturn. Gilliam County has recovered only 10 percent of the jobs it lost during the recession, while Crook and Grant counties have recovered fewer than 30 percent.

The good news is that nearly 100 percent of Oregon counties are now gaining jobs rather than losing them, McMullen said.

The lone exception — Morrow County — is actually an economic success story, but has recently lost some jobs due to the completion of major construction projects, he said.

Oregon now has about 2 unemployed people per job opening, down from 11 people per open position in late 2009.

In terms of income, the top 20 percent of Oregon households are now making 6.7 percent more money than they were a decade ago, adjusted for inflation, he said. Inflation-adjusted incomes are about 1 percent lower among the middle 20 percent of households and 7 percent lower among the bottom 20 percent.

Oregon is the 12th most trade-dependent state in the U.S., he said. Computer and electronic equipment lead in the way in exports, followed by heavy manufactured products such as metal and machinery, then agricultural goods and forestry products.

LEGISLATIVE BRIEFCASE

Legislation would raise Oregon's smoking age to 21

An Oregon lawmaker who also is a family physician plans to reintroduce legislation this week that would raise the legal smoking age from 18 to 21. The proposal by Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, is intended to limit teenagers access to tobacco.

The legislation would impose first-time civil penalties of \$50 for clerks and \$500 for managers who sell to minors. People of legal age who give tobacco to minors would likely face similar penalties as store clerks, Steiner Hayward said.

Lawmakers backing pesticide restrictions poised to shape farm policy

Lawmakers with strong track records of supporting pesticide restrictions are chairing two Senate committees that are positioned to affect Oregon agricultural policies in 2017. Senate Bill 499 — a proposal to strip pesticide protections from Oregon's "right to farm" law — was introduced at the behest of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

whose chair is Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene.

Oregon's "Right to Farm and Forest" law prohibits local ordinances restricting common farm practices as well as nuisance and trespass lawsuits against such farm practices. People who lose such lawsuits are required to pay the opposing party's attorney fees, which has discouraged such cases against farm practices from being filed in Oregon. Under SB 499, however, complaints alleging nuisance or trespass from pesticides are exempted from the "right to farm" law.

Lawmakers consider stronger invasive mussel defenses

Oregon lawmakers are considering whether to strengthen the state's defenses against invasive aquatic mussels that threaten both irrigation systems and ecosystems.

Currently, drivers hauling boats who don't stop at check points can be ticketed for traffic violations. The stations are located at common entry points for watercraft along Oregon's borders. Under House Bill 2321, drivers who are pulled over by police within five miles of failing to stop at a checkpoint can be charged with a misdemeanor

if they refuse to return for inspection.

During the Feb. 2 hearing, lawmakers also considered House Bill 2266, which pertains to funding for hatchery fish research.

Currently, unobligated money left over in the Oregon Hatchery Research Center Fund is transferred to the Oregon Hatchery Construction Fund at the end of each fiscal year. Under HB 2266, that money would be allowed to remain in the fund dedicated to hatchery research.

Senate committee will release revenue plan next week

Lawmakers in the Oregon Senate's Finance and Revenue committee are expected to release a package of measures this week that will likely include a broad-based tax on business.

Facing a nearly \$1.8 billion shortfall to maintain existing services, business tax talks are occurring in the context of a larger discussion legislators are having about the volatility of state revenue.

Most of the state's general fund comes from income taxes, which rise and fall with changes in the economy and produce what State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, has described as "crazy gyrations."

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