

# Buckle up for a testy political year

**I recognize that this column focuses quite a bit on the political world that surrounds the industry. OAN and AmericanHort are your warriors on policy.**

This is important, because elected officials can make the industry buckle as quick as a pen signs a piece of paper. We have you covered at the state and federal level.

As the saying goes, “Either we are at the table or on the menu.” The new year has both promise and storm clouds. But we have drawn up a game plan to defend the industry.

## **Oregon’s legislature faces significant challenges**

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek has proposed a nearly \$138 billion budget during the next two years. This is a 10% increase. Many factors will play into what the association is able to accomplish by passing bills this year and which issues we will have to defend against.

The governor, who is eligible to run for re-election in 2026, will push for quantum budget increases and policy flexibility for housing and homelessness. Her priorities include mental health, substance abuse treatment, early childhood education, and K-12 education.

Will she get her full wish list? Oregon Capital Chronicle said it the best: Kotek’s budget is carved in soap, not stone. The one certainty is the 2025 Legislature will fiddle with it. After Kotek presented her budget at a press conference,

## **The bathtub with two drains**

I have heard this metaphor for the state’s budget, and it speaks to me. We can have all the plans for policy, but this year will be dominated by the 476-page budget proposal. The big issues that will dwarf all other issues will include paying for Medicaid; finding a way to finance Oregon’s transportation system (which faces a huge shortfall), and meeting public sector unions’ expectations to get pay

increases that have been deferred.

So word to the wise: if you want to pass something, it better not cost too much money.

## **OAN is focused and will push hard**

Over 3,000 bills will be introduced in the 2025 legislative session. Around 350 would typically pass. At the top of OAN’s agenda is passing a fix for agricultural overtime. I am optimistic, but I’m not under any illusions. It will be an uphill climb.

Water transfers is another critical issue we need to make progress on, and a bill has been drafted to allow agriculture to be able to move water around the operation.

Another priority is addressing Oregon’s commercial activities tax. It taxes income, not profits, and as such is regressive, especially for low margin industries like ours. The OAN Board of Directors wants to engage in a conversation to exempt green goods from the tax. It is likely that this engagement will take 2–4 years to accomplish.

## **The 2025 legislative session could get ugly**

Oregon’s urban-rural divide is growing. Land use planning, transportation fairness, and the business climate are all critical issues facing the industry. The general election in 2024 handed Democrats a legislative supermajority in both chambers, but by the slimmest of margins in each. It means that if the majority sticks together, they can approve new taxes without winning any Republican support.

The OAN is solution-oriented and has demonstrated bipartisan cooperation to advocate for the industry’s interests. This will not change in 2025. We believe Gov. Kotek and legislative leadership when they say they have an open door and will work across the aisle on promoting Oregon’s priorities. However, politics is politics and there are significant differences between the minority and majority on what it means to move the state forward.

This year is the starting gun for the race for governor and we will see political positioning for that race, as well as races



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for Congress. The tone and tenor for the 6-month legislative session, which begins this month, will depend on communication between caucus leaders, the governor and a bevy of industries, like the OAN. We will play hard, but fairly.

## **Federal vs. state and vice versa**

Unfortunately, the possible train wreck at the federal level may permeate what happens in the state. We are seeing reports that “blue state” legislatures may attempt to pass “Trump proof” legislation and promote policies that are not in the interest of OAN or agriculture.

Conversely, if the incoming president pushes for mass deportations of immigrants, implements tariffs on Canada and Mexico, or cuts USDA APHIS, then we will have our hands full.

We are up for the challenge and so is AmericanHort.

## **Speaking with strength**

You, the members, are the best advocates the association has. I have often said that 50 words from a constituent are worth 500 from a lobbyist. We have resources to help you directly connect with your elected officials.

I am proud of the advocacy training we conduct to help you become the best messenger you can be. OAN is building an army of elite voices. We encourage you to jump in, tap into your passion and expertise, and join arms with your community to make Oregon a better place. Our next Advocacy Training session is scheduled for noon on Tuesday, January 14, 2025. We hope to see you there! ☺