



# An Incredible Quality of Life

An Interview with  
The Honorable Kate Brown, Governor of Oregon

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Kate Brown, Oregon's 38th Governor, has dedicated her life to standing up for Oregon's families and ensuring every Oregonian has the chance to lead a good life. Under Governor Brown's leadership, state government is committed to using every taxpayer dollar wisely, to creating a seamless system of education, to making Oregon a leader in meeting the challenge of climate change, and to making sure everyone has access to the health-*



The Hon. Kate Brown

*care they want at a price they can afford. From 2009 to 2015, Governor Brown served as Oregon's Secretary of State, where she created the Office of Small Business Assistance to streamline licensing and other services for business owners across the state. As Governor, she has continued her focus on expanding economic growth through the work of her Regional Solutions team who lead state and local officials to work with businesses to foster economic development projects around the state. Governor Brown grew up in Minnesota and earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Colorado-Boulder. She came to Oregon to attend Lewis and Clark's Northwestern School of Law, where she received her law degree and Certificate in Environmental Law.*

**You have been very clear that education is a key to Oregon's success. Will you discuss your efforts around education reform and have you been happy with the impact you've been able to make?**

I'm very pleased with the progress we've been making. My focuses in the education arena are three-fold: number one, improving outcomes for high school students – we were able to quadruple our investment in career and technical education (CTE) by funding it at a level of \$170 million.

In addition, we secured specific funding to address what we see as the key challenges in improving student graduation rates by addressing chronic absenteeism, making sure that students who have experienced trauma have the support services they need, and providing an early warning system so we can identify those who are struggling and get them the assistance they need.

I'm pleased with the direction we have taken in terms of improving outcomes for our high school students, but my goal is to ensure that every high school student graduates with a plan for their future, be that a job, skills training or college.

The second focus is on creating a seamless system of education from cradle to career. 2017 was a tough budget year for us, but I was pleased we were able to preserve investments in high quality preschool and early childhood education programs. This results in children showing up to kindergarten ready to learn.

We were finally able to move to full-day kindergarten, something that people in Oregon have been working on instituting for 50 years.

"Seamless" to us means everything from children transferring seamlessly from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school but, very importantly, also from high school to either technical education, community college, or university, and making sure that credits earned transfer seamlessly across institutions as well.

The third focus is on making sure that our educators have the tools and professional development opportunities they need to be excellent at what they do. Quality teaching is essential to our success. We have been able to work with a nonprofit called The Chalkboard Project to establish an educator advancement fund to support excellence in teaching. It is based on The Chalkboard Project's work, but it will be a public/nonprofit partnership that will allow us to make great strides forward in ensuring that our educators have the coaching, professional development tools and the mentoring they need to be excellent educators.

Two bills passed this year address the changing faces of our children. We were able to pass legislation requiring ethnic studies in K-12 as well as implementing a tribal curriculum in our school districts across the state.

**How is Oregon working to ensure that, as kids get into high school and college, they are being trained in the proper skills needed for the future?**

Preparing our young people to "graduate with a plan" results in Oregon being able to compete in a global economy. This means we must make sure that they have access

to hands-on learning opportunities in middle school and high school that will provide them with transferable skills.

As we are expanding access to career and technical education, we want to make sure it aligns with the workforce needs of that particular area or region, and that those skills are transferable.

One great example is the growing line of businesses Oregon has in new audio/visual technology. We are working to make sure that when students come out of high school, they have the technical skills needed to be successful in this industry. Our Blue Mountain Community College is developing a program so students can learn those skills.

As we are expanding access to the green economy, be it solar or wind, we want to make sure that students have the opportunity for the technical training in high school, and post high school as appropriate, in this technology.

**How are you dealing with the challenges in controlling Oregon's state budget while trying to improve the services the citizens expect?**

We were faced with a roughly \$1.4-billion deficit out of a \$20-billion budget. My first focus was on tightening our belt. We're figuring out how to deliver services more effectively and efficiently while providing better service to Oregonians.

I tasked my agency heads with coming up with innovative cost-containment measures. It runs the gamut from our department of administrative services renegotiating leases for state offices to my police superintendent asking his troopers to start giving out coupons instead of issuing tickets for broken tail lights so people can easily go to the local auto store and buy a new tail light.

We are also trying to making sure that Oregon's economy continues to grow. If we look at national indicators over the past few months, we had the fastest job-growth rate in the country and we have one of the fastest growing GDPs. But this is Oregon, and our state motto is, "She flies on her own wings" not "she rests on her laurels," so I worked very closely with the business community, Republican and Democratic leaders across the state, and communities to deliver a transportation package. This will not only create 16,000 jobs but will also keep Oregon's economy humming by ensuring

producers can get their products to market efficiently and people can get to work and school safely.

**When it comes to these efforts, how important is accountability and transparency?**

I am a big proponent of “Run Government Run,” which involves telling Oregonians exactly what I plan to deliver and then delivering on it.

I came into office in February 2015 under somewhat unusual circumstances. There was a huge backlog of unfulfilled records requests. We had some ethics questions and we had access issues.

I made a commitment to Oregonians that we would work hard every single day to improve the level of transparency and accountability in state government. I brought in the first ever staff attorney to tackle public records. Every single public record request now goes online for anyone to see once that record is completed. I am one of only two governors in the entire country to do this. I have also issued multiple executive orders to streamline, speed up, and make public records release more efficient.

We also immediately toughened our state ethics commission. We gave them more tools in their tool box to hold elected officials accountable and passed a number of bills that strengthened our ethics laws.

The work didn't stop after the 2015 session. We went into session and passed three bills which create the most significant transformation in Oregon's public records laws since they were originally drafted in the early 1970s. They create a commission and a public advisory committee to oversee a series of reforms. These bipartisan bills will have a huge impact on Oregon's public records process.

**How important has it been to strengthen the public/private partnership within Oregon to achieve your goals?**

Oregon has passed the most comprehensive and historic transportation package ever. It provides a \$5.3-billion investment in our transportation system and the business community was key to its passage on multiple fronts. One of the most exciting elements of this is that it provides for the first ever statewide investment in public transit. The business community stood shoulder to shoulder with us to support this request. They understand that having a public transit system literally lifts families out of poverty and gives our citizens an opportunity to access education, job training, and good jobs.

Another area the business community supported concerned funding for the Oregon health plan. Despite facing a significant shortfall in Oregon's health plan funding, we were able to work with providers, hospitals, insurers, and our coordinated care organizations to maintain funding. In addition, we expanded healthcare coverage to more than 15,000 Oregon children so that every single child in the state will now have access to healthcare coverage. We could not have done that without the business community's support.

**What does Oregon provide as a competitive advantage over other U.S. states?**

Many companies are interested in doing business here because we provide something not all states have: an incredible quality of life.

Oregon is a great place to do business and a wonderful place to raise a family, and it's a great place to play as well.

One can still afford to buy a house here when compared with the rest of the West Coast, there is relatively easy access to the great outdoors, and our electricity and water costs are relatively low.

Nike is going through an expansion here and Amazon has just opened their third fulfillment center in Oregon. We're also seeing a number of businesses in the tech sector looking to establish operations here. People want to live here for the lifestyle, so businesses will continue to move here to take advantage of our growing workforce.

**As governor, what has been the key to success reaching across party lines to get things done?**

What I love about governing in this environment is our ability to do just that. We call it GSD – get stuff done – and we have been able to work across party lines to deliver on the transportation package and on healthcare.

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We will have a solid group of folks going with us on our Asia Trade Mission to continue to connect with countries in the Pacific Rim that are key export markets for us.

It's safe to say that governors are on the frontlines, and we're showing that state government can function effectively.

**What made you want to get involved in public service?**

I wanted to be a voice for the voiceless. I went to law school because I wanted to have

the tools to achieve justice and equality in this world. I have been so honored by having this opportunity to make Oregon a better place to live for our families, to fight to maintain this incredible quality of life, and to be able to preserve the beauty and bounty of Oregon for future generations.

**Are there moments when you can celebrate the wins?**

I went to the Idaho-Oregon onion growing region this winter following a number of devastating snowstorms. Their onion storage facilities caved in and when I toured it with Idaho Governor Butch Otter, it looked like a tornado had hit the area.

They normally send five million pounds of onions out of that community every day. They are literally trucking onions to a train depot in Walla Walla and then the onions come back through Ontario, Oregon as the train passes through. They said if they had a transloader facility to load the onions in Ontario, it would substantially reduce their cost and create savings. The legislator representing the area was committed to helping his community and we worked together to sign a transportation package that included a transloader facility for the people of Ontario. This was truly an extraordinary moment for me.

**What efforts are being made to support women and minorities in Oregon?**

Opportunities exist for everyone in the market, but we have to do a better job of making the market accessible to everyone. I encourage young people I speak with, regardless of where they live or which party they stand for, to get engaged. I truly believe that each one of us can make a difference and make Oregon and America better places to live.

We are very aware of the challenges and barriers that women and other underserved communities face, so we have been working hard to systemically tackle those barriers.

We have passed a predictive scheduling bill, the first of its kind in the nation. We also passed a pay equity bill and a comprehensive women's healthcare bill to remove barriers not only for women, but also for other people who face challenges.

We work hard to remove barriers in education and healthcare for people of color. In the public safety system, we have also passed some extraordinary legislation that prohibits racial profiling and keeps track of data to reduce penalties for possession of small quantities of a controlled substance from a felony to a misdemeanor because data very clearly proves this has an unequal impact on Latino and African-American men.

We're not stopping there. We also want to make sure that people can get good-paying jobs in every single corner of the state, including rural Oregon. My team and I have been focused on providing rural Oregon with the capital and infrastructure they need to generate job growth. This requires investments in housing, creating public/private partnerships, and investing in water infrastructure. We also are committed to our small businesses and giving them the capital and technical assistance they need to create more good-paying jobs. ●