



Wednesday, November 12, 2025

News & Notes

Typically I use this space in the newsletter to talk about a policy or issue that I think needs highlighting. Or, I try to bring data or other information that I think provides context for the work we are doing - or need to do.

But today, I want to talk about what it means to have a forum like this newsletter, or the WEA stage, or the microphones offered me by other organizations.

For a good part of my career, I worked for electeds and it was my job to amplify their words and priorities. Since coming to WEA, that's all changed. I now have the extraordinary honor and opportunity to represent the business community, working in partnership with the public and non-profit sectors, in a push for our region to do better.



This last year, I've had the opportunity to talk about the challenges and opportunities in front of our good partners at NAIOP as a launch to their annual bus tour. I was honored by GPI with the Greater Portland Champion award and used my time on stage to call out our region - and our state's - anemic approach to growth. I was invited to speak at an east county collaborative working in partnership to realize growth opportunities. Next week, I will have the chance to talk economic development strategy with a group of smaller jurisdictions out in Clackamas County and later this year I will have the chance to speak at CREW Portland's 2025 Fireside Chat. I'll be kicking off 2026 opening the annual Pacific NW Steel Fabricators meeting - just another opportunity to share the message that centering economic growth is critical for success of our region.

This work is not just about telling the hard truths. It is also about being willing to have the hard conversations with policy makers. It is about being willing to lean into solution - rather than just reiterating the problem. And it is using the leverage of these opportunities for public conversation to put pressure where and when needed.

Right now, I am calling for a fundamental change in how we think about growth and pushing back on our region - and our state's - Culture of "No". The data is telling the story that doing business here is hard and that businesses are responding by leaving or expanding elsewhere.

Moving this work forward means having to be unafraid of push back or resistance. WEA is ready to advance policy solutions that will make a difference for job makers and local communities.

Want to know more about how our work is making an impact? Reach out to me.

Elizabeth

Want to know more about how you can support WEA's work?
Reach out to [Dani](#) about Membership and Partnership Opportunities.

Guest Columnist - Keith Leavitt



Oregon Needs a New Economic Playbook

Over the span of my 30-plus-year career—including at the Oregon Economic Development Department in the 1990s, 25 years at the Port of Portland, and service on the Oregon Business Development Commission—I've seen firsthand how the right economic strategy can shape a state's future. The playbook Oregon built in the 1990s was smart, pragmatic, and effective, aligning land use, infrastructure, and industry in ways that made Oregon a national leader in advanced manufacturing and trade. But the world has changed, and Oregon hasn't kept up.

Oregon can no longer coast on a dated economic strategy and set of tools. As a state, we face real long-term headwinds. Metro's own 2024 Urban Growth Report projects a slowing in population and manufacturing—signaling that, without a new strategy, our economic trajectory will flatten just as peer states are accelerating. If we accept that trajectory, we are choosing economic stagnation.

Oregon's trade dependence has long been both a strength and a vulnerability. Our exporters, ports, and logistics infrastructure have anchored our economy for decades, but global trade is shifting. Federal policy now favors domestic production—through tariffs, reshoring, and targeted investments like the CHIPS Act, Infrastructure and Jobs Act, and Inflation Reduction Act. States that have built modern manufacturing ecosystems are capturing these opportunities. Ours was built largely in the 1990s to capture that decade's wave of semiconductor manufacturing. That strategy served us well, but today it is stale.

A quiet but lethal weakness has become undeniable: we lack large, development-ready industrial sites. With robust development from 1990–2010, we know that this inventory is now exhausted. As a leader of the Semiconductor Taskforce's industrial land work, it was painfully clear that Oregon could not compete for major investments. Oregon routinely fails the first screen in national site-selection searches—not because we lack workforce or location advantages, but because we simply don't have land that can be built on within a modern project timeline.

This was highlighted in Senate Bill 4, the Oregon CHIPS Act, during the 2023 Legislative Session. Other states treat industrial land readiness as a given; in Oregon, it remains an unresolved debate. Site selectors searching for 200- to 400-acre, infrastructure-served parcels find dozens in Austin, Phoenix, Reno, or Columbus—but none here. Our regulatory and land use process, though well-intentioned, is uncertain, slow, and prone to litigation. That uncertainty drives investment elsewhere before conversations even begin.

The lesson from our peer regions is clear. Austin, Phoenix, New York, Ohio, and Reno have built long-range, bipartisan economic strategies that align land, infrastructure, incentives, and workforce. They invested in site-readiness funds, created cash-based deal-closing programs,

and tied training dollars directly to active industrial projects. Those investments delivered billions in new semiconductor, EV, and clean-energy manufacturing that Oregon was never positioned to compete for.

It's time to update Oregon's playbook—one that embraces growth as essential to funding public services, not as a threat to be managed. We need large, infrastructure-ready sites, predictable permitting, modern incentives, and leadership committed to proactive economic growth. Oregon's values of stewardship and livability remain a strength—but without a modern strategy, they will be supported by a shrinking economy. Growth, done right, is not the problem. It's the solution.

Keith Leavitt is the Founder of Confluence Strategies, a consulting firm focused on economic development, ports, and industrial development.

A shorter version of this article was published in The Oregonian's Letters to the Editor on November 6, 2025.

State of the Westside is Next Week.

Interested in Sponsorship?
Reach out to Dani to find out how to get involved.



**Presenting
Sponsor**



2025 STATE OF THE WESTSIDE

November 20, 11:30am - 1:30pm

Hosted at PCC Rock Creek

**Forum Series
Sponsor**



FEATURING



Damon Runberg
Business Oregon



John Tapogna
EcoNW



Zach Hyder
Hubbell Communication

Register for State of the Westside

Join us on Thursday, November 20 for the 2025 State of the Westside where expert panelists will join us on stage to talk about the state of business in Oregon, explore data findings and discuss what we can do to improve our regional - and state – competitiveness.

*We are rolling out a new event registration system.
If you have any problems, please reach out to **Dani**.*

WEA News

WEA Speaks with East Multnomah County Coalition

On Thursday, November 6, WEA Executive Director, Elizabeth Mazzara Myers, had the pleasure of detailing who we are and the work our organization does to the East Multnomah County (EMC) Coalition.

Formed in 2024 with the launch of the EMC Roadmap, the EMC Coalition serves as a collaborative platform that brings together cross-sector interests to leverage and scale collective resources to implement regional opportunities. The Coalition is made up of representatives from four cities (Fairview, Gresham, Troutdale, and Wood Village), additional public agencies, traded sector companies, educational institutions, and community-based organizations that meet quarterly to discuss topics, support priority projects, and share ideas on elevating inclusive economic development opportunities in the region. The Port of Portland is the present convener of the Coalition through 2026.



We look forward to more opportunities to collaborate with partners like the EMC Coalition throughout the region!

Upcoming WEA Policy Committees



GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING



Economic Development in 2026, a look ahead.

Thursday, November 13, 2025 | 7:30 - 9:00 am

*This Meeting is scheduled
to be held Hybrid at TVF&R and via Zoom*

**WEA Committees are open to
Members only.**



Ariel Nelson
City of Hillsboro



Andy Smith
Proxy



Rep. Daniel Nguyen
House District 38



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