

The Oregonian

From the Desk of
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Opinion

Editorial: Oregon is dealt a blow

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By [The Oregonian Editorial Board](#)



For decades, Oregon hasn't had to sell itself as a destination. Who wouldn't want to live in this state of trees and mountains, drink its award-winning craft beers and enjoy its laid-back culture?

Turns out – thousands of now-former Oregonians. Census figures show that about 16,000 more people left Oregon than moved in from July 2021 to July 2022. It's the first decline for Oregon since the 1980s when the nation was engulfed in a recession, as [The Oregonian/OregonLive's Jamie Goldberg reported](#). And the news is even worse for Portland, once the darling of national media. The census shows that Multnomah County lost more residents in the past two years nationwide than most every other county of its general size. While Seattle's King County saw more people moving there in 2022 after a dip in 2021, Portlanders are continuing to leave.

The gloomiest part of the news is that we all can come up with a list of reasons why. As much as Oregon has to offer, our housing unaffordability, homelessness, increasing taxation, drug addiction crisis, untreated mental illness, gun violence, traffic deaths and educational mediocrity are changing the calculus for many about where to live, raise a family or retire.

A year's decline in the state's population does not spell our doom – at least not yet. But the census provides bracing data that shows too many people have decided Oregon is no longer where their future lies. The state depends on population growth to fill jobs, provide tax dollars for public services and inject the energy and perspectives that build thriving neighborhoods and communities. A stagnant or declining population instead dictates a future of cuts and diminished opportunities that can lead to even more people moving out. As student enrollment drops, which schools should a district close? As tax dollars dry up, what services should a county health department cut? These are the kinds of questions that no community wants to have to answer.

Certainly, many people move for reasons that have little to do with government policy – to live closer to family or for a new job. But when the state swings from a perennial net gainer of population to a net loser, the worst mistake is to assume it's not about you.