

## ASTORIA POLICE FULLY STAFFED BUT OVERSTRETCHED

# THINNER BLUE LINE



PHOTOS BY DANNY MILLER/THE DAILY ASTORIAN  
**ABOVE:** Astoria Police Officer Kevin Berry communicates back to dispatch while on patrol. **TOP:** Officer Berry makes a routine traffic stop while on patrol in February. Berry is the Astoria Police Department's newest hire.

### BY THE NUMBERS

**500**

approximate amount of positions open at police agencies in Oregon as of January 2016

**400**

number of new officers trained last year at the state Department of Public Safety and Training

**1,000+**

number of officers in Oregon eligible for retirement over the next two years

# PERS plan gets public pushback

Bills would change way benefits calculated

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**  
*Capital Bureau*

SALEM — In a demonstration of the fraught political territory lawmakers enter when they scrutinize the state's public pension system, firefighters, nurses and teachers Monday testified against two state Senate bills aimed at reducing the costs of that system.

The bills, both sponsored by Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, are the latest round in the Legislature's seemingly perennial battle with the costs of the Public Employees Retirement System, the unfunded liability of which has been estimated to be at least \$21.8 billion.



**Tim Knopp**

Senate Bill 559 would require that retirement benefits be calculated using the average salary from the final five years of employment, instead of the current three years.

Senate Bill 560 would take the 6 percent of salary employees contribute, or have contributed on their behalf, to a defined contribution plan called the Individual Account Program and redirect it to their retirement benefits. The bill also caps the amount of salary used in benefits calculations at \$100,000.

In 2015, the state Supreme Court scuttled most of a package of PERS reforms the Legislature passed in 2013. That decision, in a case called *Moro v. Oregon*, essentially said that the Legislature could not make cuts to benefits already accrued. Therefore, lawmakers can only alter benefits not yet earned.

### Balancing act

The Legislature faces a complicated balancing act, one that attorney William Gary, who represented the Oregon School Boards Association in the *Moro* case, compares to a game of three-dimensional chess.

Gary told lawmakers last week that they'll have to balance sound public policy, political demands and the requirements of the law.

See **PERS**, Page 7A

# New recruit took two years to hire, train

By **ERICK BENGEL**  
*The Daily Astorian*

The Astoria Police Department has a full team of officers once again but still struggles to operate.

Last month, the department added Officer Kevin Berry, filling a vacancy that lasted more than two years. It marks the first time since Brad Johnston became police chief that the department has 16 deployable officers — the department's authorized limit.

The process of finding Berry, which began in the winter of 2015, was long and lurching.

The first attempt yielded no acceptable candidates; the top choices washed out during background checks and psychological evaluations. On the second attempt, they hired Berry in January 2016 — and,

See **POLICE**, Page 7A

# Bill would ban union, contractor campaign contributions



**Knute Buehler**

## Companion bill would require more disclosure

By **PARIS ACHEN**  
*Capital Bureau*

SALEM — A state legislator wants to prohibit state contractors and public unions from con-

tributing to political campaigns.

The legislation has a companion bill that would require bidders on state contracts to disclose their five biggest campaign contributions in the state.

"Oregon is a small place with good people, but sometimes these relationships between elected officials and state contractors get way too cozy," said state Rep. Knute Buehler, R-Bend. "We

need to find a way to make it more professional and have more transparency. I think it's important that people have confidence in their government."

Buehler was scheduled to drop the legislation Monday, the same day an opinion piece in *Forbes Magazine* by Illinois-based conservative activist Adam Andrzejewski claimed that Gov. Kate Brown and Attorney General

Ellen Rosenblum have received more than \$800,000 combined in campaign contributions from more than 200 state contractors.

Buehler, who is a rumored candidate for governor in 2018, tweeted out a link to the opinion piece Monday when he announced he had introduced the legislation. In an interview with the EO Media Group/Pamplin Media Group Capital Bureau,

Buehler cited Illinois as a state that had passed laws similar to his proposals.

The Bend Republican had been looking into campaign finance reforms well before Andrzejewski penned his opinion. In 2015, Buehler's office obtained advice from Legislative Counsel indicating that a

See **BILL**, Page 7A

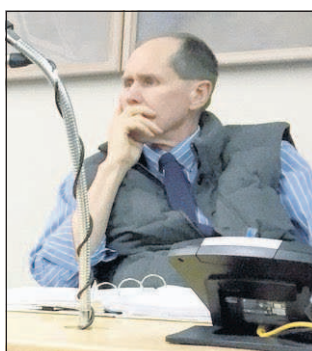
# Cannon Beach City Hall confronts a shaky outlook

## New building could cost at least \$3 million

By **R.J. MARX**  
*The Daily Astorian*

CANNON BEACH — Cannon Beach councilors await a Plan B after bids for a proposed City Hall renovation exceeded the budget.

After design, updates and review, Public Works Director Dan Grassick opened sealed bids in mid-January to find the two construction bids had both surpassed the city's \$150,000 cap.



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian  
**A new City Hall building, Dan Grassick said, could cost upward of \$3 million.**

At last week's City Council meeting, Grassick said the bids exceeded "well above \$200 a square foot."

In a competitive construction environment, the scope of the job was well below what contractors could make on a standard residence.

"What we realized from the feedback from the construction community, was timing's everything," Grassick said. "Everybody's busy. Money has come in suddenly in the last 15 months and we've seen the building pace pick up at a pace we haven't seen since 2007."

A new city hall building would have cost at least \$3 million, but modifications were expected to come in at a fraction of that cost.



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

This area of City Hall was among those slated for remodel.

See **CITY HALL**, Page 7A

