

Police: ‘Essentially, it’s a rolling opening’

Continued from Page 1A

one year later, the department released him from training.

Statewide trend

The difficulties that Astoria Police faced in searching for a new recruit are part of a statewide trend.

Eriks Gabliks, director of the state Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, said that, in Oregon, more trained and certified officers are leaving law enforcement — through retirement, career changes and other avenues — than qualified applicants are entering it.

In January 2016, the training agency surveyed police agencies throughout Oregon — state, counties, cities and Indian reservations — and discovered approximately 500 positions open that month.

The agency trained about 400 new officers last year and will be adding approximately 160 by spring. But the number of Oregon’s officers eligible for retirement will exceed 1,000 over the next two years, Gabliks said.

It recently took Seaside Police Department two attempts as well to fill about six positions, according to Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham.

Recruitment challenges

A successful recruiting process is increasingly rare. “I would say that we have about a 50/50 chance every time we go out at finding a successful recruit,” Johnston said.

And it usually takes between a year and 18 months, from announcing the opening, to making an offer, to getting an officer trained as a solo force. Most applicants don’t survive background checks and psychological evaluations.

The Astoria Police Department has slightly relaxed its standards on candidates’ history of marijuana use: Poten-

tial recruits can have used the drug after it became legal, but not habitually. And, once hired, they cannot use it at all. But other standards remain high and fixed.

“If we want policing to move in the direction that I want it to move in, which is a very professional endeavor, we can’t lessen our standards just because it’s getting harder to hire,” Johnston said.

Though many police agencies are doubling down on recruitment efforts, the days of the large-scale recruitment have subsided, Gabliks said.

‘Our staffing level is our single most limiting factor. And when we compare ourselves to adjacent agencies, either by population or by activity, we are understaffed — and, in some cases, it’s dramatic.’

Brad Johnston

Astoria police chief, speaking to the Astoria City Council

Apart from law enforcement’s high-risk nature, the national conversation on policing — fueled by social media — may have contributed to a drop in the profession’s popularity.

“I think it has discouraged people who are on the fence,” Johnston said. “Those that are committed to a career of service are still interested.”

Would-be recruits know their decisions may draw a lot of media attention, especially after deadly force encounters.

“If a police officer shoots and kills someone because they have to, within a matter of minutes, somebody will have it on a social media network, and, 5 o’clock that night, it’ll be on the

local news,” Gabliks said.

If a person can make an equivalent living in a job that “won’t land them on the front page of every paper in the country, that’s probably a good thing to most people that are thinking about entering the profession,” Johnston said.

Understaffed

With a 16-officer ceiling, the Astoria Police Department’s ability to maintain a complete roster of available officers — enough to provide optimum coverage — has been an intermittent challenge.

officer as the Clatsop County Sheriff’s Department, Astoria Police would have to add about five officers.

During a three-week period in 2016, the department had only seven officers to work patrol. This was due to a knee surgery, an emergency appendectomy, a scheduled vacation, one officer out on protected leave and another in training — all happening at once.

Overstretched

It was the third time in the last two years that the 12-person patrol division stood at less than 50 percent strength. Johnston, Deputy Chief Eric Halverson and detectives worked extra shifts to fill the gaps, which meant that other important work did not get done.

The shortage became so dire that Johnston and City Manager Brett Estes discussed limiting 24-hour police coverage if the department lost one more employee.

“We were talking about it in concept, but we didn’t get there,” Johnston said.

Meanwhile, the department’s discretionary activities — outreach events like Coffee with a Cop and the Citizen’s Police Academy — are difficult to pull off with limited personnel, and drive up overtime costs.

“We have to bring people in to participate in those because we don’t have the staffing to do it with who’s on duty,” Johnston said.

With Berry, the department is in a better position. Clatsop Community College has reinstated its criminal justice program, which has historically been a source of promising hires, such as Halverson and Detective Nicole Riley.

However, “our reality right now is that we’re stretched to the point where things are going to fall through the cracks,” Johnston told the City Council, “and I’m worried about that.”

WORLD IN BRIEF



AP Photo/Susan Walsh

President Donald Trump passes Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford, left, and former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn as he arrives via Air Force One at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla. Flynn resigned Monday after getting in the center of controversy.

Associated Press

Flynn, fired once by a president, now resigns to another

WASHINGTON — Fired by one American commander in chief for insubordination, Michael Flynn has now delivered his resignation to another.

President Donald Trump had been weighing the fate of his national security adviser, a hard-charging, feather-ruffling retired lieutenant general who just three weeks into the new administration had put himself in the center of a controversy. Flynn resigned late Monday.

At issue was Flynn’s contact with Moscow’s ambassador to the United States. Flynn and Ambassador Sergey Kislyak appear to have discussed U.S. sanctions late last year, raising questions about whether he was freelancing on foreign policy while President Barack Obama was still in office and whether he misled Trump officials about the calls.

The center of a storm is a familiar place for Flynn. His military career ended when Obama dismissed him as defense intelligence chief. Flynn claimed he was pushed out for holding tougher views than the Obama administration about Islamic extremism. But a former senior U.S. official who worked with Flynn said the firing was for insubordination, after the Army lieutenant general failed to follow guidance from superiors.

Once out of government, he disappeared into the murky world of mid-level defense contractors and international influence peddlers. He shocked his former colleagues a little more than a year later by appearing at a Moscow banquet headlined by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Given a second chance by Trump, Flynn, a lifelong if apolitical Democrat, became a trusted and eager confidant of the Republican candidate, joining anti-Hillary Clinton campaign chants of “Lock Her Up” and tweeting that “Fear of Muslims is RATIONAL.”

Russian lawmakers mount fierce defense of Flynn

MOSCOW — Russian lawmakers today mounted a fierce defense of U.S. President Donald Trump’s former national security adviser, who resigned following reports that he misled White House officials about his contacts with Russia.

Michael Flynn resigned Monday night, conceding that he gave “incomplete information” about his calls with Russia’s ambassador to the U.S.

A U.S. official told The Associated Press that Flynn was in frequent contact with Ambassador Sergey Kislyak on the day the Obama administration imposed sanctions on Russia after U.S. intelligence reported that Russia had interfered with the U.S. elections. The Kremlin has confirmed that Flynn has been in contact with Kislyak but denied that they talked about lifting sanctions.

Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the foreign affairs committee at the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, said in a post on Facebook that firing a national security adviser for his contacts with Russia is “not just paranoia but something even worse.”

Kosachev also expressed frustration with the Trump administration.

Damaged dam system threatens Northern California towns

OROVILLE, Calif. — A huge Northern California reservoir, held in place by a massive dam, has always been central to the life of the towns around it.

Now the lake that has brought them holiday fireworks and salmon festivals could bring disaster.

Nearly 200,000 people, who evacuated Sunday over fears that a damaged spillway at Lake Oroville could fail and unleash a wall of water, have to stay away indefinitely while officials race to repair it before more rains arrive Thursday.

Evacuees felt strange on Monday to see their beloved lake associated with urgent voices on the national news.

“Never in our lives did we think anything like this would have happened,” said Brannan Ramirez, who has lived in Oroville, a town of about 16,000 people, for about five years.

Trump win on China trademark raises ethics questions

SHANGHAI — President Donald Trump is poised to receive something today that he has been trying to get from China for a decade: trademark rights to his own name. After suffering rejection after rejection in China’s courts, he saw his prospects change dramatically after starting his presidential campaign.

Trump’s late triumph in the fight to wrest back his brand for construction services could prove to be the first of many intellectual property victories in China during his presidency. Each win creates value for Trump’s business empire, and ethics questions about his administration.

At stake are 49 pending trademark applications — all made during his campaign — and 77 marks already registered under his own name, most of which will come up for renewal during his term. The construction-services case also raises the possibility that the president could claw back control of more than 225 Trump-related marks held or sought by others in China, for an array of things including Trump toilets, condoms, pacemakers and even a “Trump International Hotel.”

Ethics lawyers from across the political spectrum say the trademarks present conflicts of interest for Trump and may violate the emoluments clause of the U.S. Constitution, which bars public servants from accepting anything of value from foreign governments unless explicitly approved by Congress.

Countries could use Trump’s desire to consolidate control over his brand to extend — or withhold — favor, especially a nation such as China where the courts and bureaucracy are influenced by the ruling Communist Party and by design reflect the leadership’s political imperatives.

PERS: Divided into three generations

Continued from Page 1A

Some school officials, such as Cheri Helt, the chairwoman of the Bend-La Pine School Board, said that cutting back on PERS benefits is the only option in order to prevent layoffs and further financial strain on local governments.

Others, such as Paul Kylo, the vice-chairman of the Salem-Keizer school board, said that the cuts proposed in Senate Bills 559 and 560 would worsen districts’ ability to recruit and retain talented people for positions that are already hard to hire for, such as math and science teachers.

Three generations

Over the years, PERS has been divided into three generations, based on date of hire — Tier 1, Tier 2, and the Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan.

Detractors say the proposed changes disproportionately affect current employees — many of whom are on the Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan — and disincentivize new employees from entering public service professions.

Knopp said that according to an actuary, the approximate savings should Senate Bills 559 and 560 be implemented would be \$5 billion to \$6 billion.

But Bob Livingston, a Salem firefighter and president of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council, said Monday the actuary did not take into account a significant precedent: that more state workers than expected retire in years when the Legislature vows to take up reforms to the system. When that happens, more

employees draw on retirement benefits.

Some witnesses testifying against the reforms also advocated for revenue increases.

The state faces two, somewhat interconnected financial problems: The nearly \$1.8 billion shortfall in the budget that lawmakers must address by midnight July 9; and the unfunded liability of PERS. Personnel costs make up a significant chunk of the state’s costs every two-year budget cycle.

Business taxes are another subject legislative committees are taking up this week, three months after the failure of Measure 97, a ballot measure that would have raised approximately \$3 billion per year by creating a gross sales receipts tax on certain corporations with more than \$25 million in annual sales in Oregon. Union groups publicly advocated in favor of the measure.

According to legislative leadership, unions and the state’s business groups, which by and large have advocated in favor of cutting PERS, have started discussing possible common ground behind closed doors.

The Senate Workforce Committee convenes again Wednesday to discuss what Chairwoman Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, calls a controversial topic — refinancing PERS. The committee will also discuss several “ideas” Knopp is working on, none of which were yet publicly available Monday evening as legislative concepts or bills.

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City Hall: Building is ‘cobbled together’

Continued from Page 1A

Among changes sought were a new entrance, doorway and storage for police. Offices would have been shuffled so building, planning and police visitors could access those offices through separate entrances. Haystack Rock Awareness Project offices would have been moved and the finance corner completely redone. The Design Review Board approved the final stage of a plan to upgrade windows, doors and exterior at a December public hearing.

Other options

Grassick laid out the city’s options after an inquiry from City Councilor Nancy McCarthy.

“You’re probably looking at \$1.2 million to renovate this entire building,” Grassick said. “You’re faced with about \$3.1 million to \$3.5 million to replace it somewhere else.”

“Somewhere else” could be the 55-acre South Wind property, located east of U.S. Highway 101 almost entirely outside the tsunami inundation zone, which was purchased by the city in 2013 with the goal of housing an emergency shelter, a police station, fire station, school, child care and a food bank.

Grassick said the present Gower Street building, with its central location, “is realistically the best place to stay for now,” although he fell short of recommending a new building.

“Until you do something with the South Wind facil-

ities, you would probably not rebuild City Hall until a tsunami takes this one off the face of the earth,” Grassick said. “If you’re going to go forward staying here, let’s renovate this building and make it livable and habitable. It’s starting to fall down around your ears.”

The integrity of the 1940s structure is fine, Grassick said at an earlier meeting, but City Hall would likely not survive an earthquake under today’s standards.

The building is “cobbled together,” he said, with the exception of the renovated bathroom and the kitchen. “The police department doesn’t have enough room to basically function. It’s wholly inadequate for what they need to do.”

Hazards

Hazards in the building include heavy storage in the attic that would crash down in an earthquake, and soft sand under the kitchen floor requiring a redesign of heating and air-conditioning units. The northwest corner of the building is sinking, Grassick said, and the weight of the ceiling is moving the building to the west continually at about a quarter-inch every year.

Grassick said he plans to meet with City Manager Brant Kucera, City Planner Mark Barnes and architect David Vonada to determine construction and engineering estimates.

Those results, Grassick said, would likely be presented to the council in a March or April work session.

Bill: Fashioned after Sen. Wyden’s proposed legislation

Continued from Page 1A

constitutional amendment to ban public labor unions from contributing to elected officials’ campaigns would hold up against a legal challenge.

The bidder disclosure bill is

fashioned after legislation U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, proposed at the federal level.

Brown’s office had no comment on Buehler’s proposals.

“With the exception of bills pertaining to her legislative priorities, Gov. Brown

rarely indicates her predisposition to sign or not sign a bill in advance of it getting to her desk,” said Chris Pair, the governor’s interim communications director. “Before signature is considered, the governor’s legal team reviews

every bill for legal sufficiency (passes constitutional muster), and it is imprudent to get ahead of that process.”

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