

Hood River News

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PERS rides in

State should deal with it before the next Session

The State of Oregon might look at Friday's worrisome news on PERS as an opportunity.

The Supreme Court ruled Thursday that a key part of the Legislature's 2013 overhaul of the Public Employees Retirement System is unconstitutional. The court overruled the Legislature's plan to reduce cost of living adjustments on retirement benefits earned before the state altered the public pension system.

This could amount to a potential increase of about \$800 million in benefits that public agencies would have to pay out in 2017-19.

Oregon School Boards Association said in a statement Friday that, "Unless the state Legislature takes action, those projected rate increases would continue to add significant costs to schools and other government agencies well past 2019, the fiscal office projects."

Jim Green, deputy executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association, said he is hopeful that legislators will act swiftly to mitigate the financial blow schools are facing for 2017 and beyond.

"Figures of this magnitude have a direct effect on the quality of education Oregon schools can offer," Green said. "Unless we can find a solution — and soon — our schools will face the very real prospect of teacher layoffs and cutting school days."

It seems clear that schools and other public services will be looking at significant budget impacts starting in 2017.

How you look at PERS comes down to what is a stronger argument:

■ "Oregon cannot afford to shortchange its students. Our state economy depends on a thriving education system," Green said.

■ PERS pensions are for public servants, "the people who educate our children, care for elderly and keep us safe," said the public employees' attorney, Greg Hartman, according to an Oregonian newspaper report.

However, the question remains: since when is guaranteed money for anything still a universal assumption? There was more expected in the bargain by all state agencies whose missions are to teach, care and protect, before our states' 10-year (and counting) run of budget cut years.

The expansion of PERS is a looming presence that public agencies have kept at bay but dreaded to see return, over the past 5-6 years. Now it appears that PERS is back, like the gang that got headed off at the pass in 2013 but found its way into town in 2015.

This is no simple matter, and legislators are breathing a sigh of relief that the court ruling won't affect the 2015-17 biennial budget it just approved. But the PERS fight is not that far off, and the State should find a way to forge a fix well before the 2016 session.

The governor should convene a blue ribbon commission to come up with a strategy to at least reduce the drastic cutbacks facing schools and other services.

Deal with it before the next session, so the conversation on strategy is in place before the necessary numbers discussion that will ultimately drive the entire issue.

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Our readers write

Not in Oregon

The proposed Nestlé bottling plant in Cascade Locks is not aligned with the progressive environmental ideals that the state of Oregon embodies. While being sensitive to the economic frustrations of the town and the need to increase tax revenue for the small community, Oregon needs to help such communities develop methods of doing so in ways that are truly sustainable and progressive for future generations of Oregon citizens. For Oregon to "sell its soul" to a corporation such as Nestlé, who has no vested interest in our values around environmental stewardship, is a maneuver that Oregon will come to regret should this pass. Taking water out of our ecosystem to put in a plastic bottle and sell for a profit is not among the progressive Oregon ideas that I referred to earlier, especially at a time when we see a reduced snowpack on our nearest volcano and our southern neighboring state is dealing with fallout from significant drought conditions and are living with water restrictions. McCloud, Calif., did the right thing by keeping Nestlé out, with the only problem being that Nestlé thought Oregon would be more willing to oblige.

Governor Brown's leadership on this matter is critical especially at a time when the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is apparently attempting to clear the path for Nestlé to sequester water from our ecosystem. I mistakenly assumed that our own state agency (ODFW) would act as a protector of this most important natural resource and would not be in the business of making back room deals to hand off our resources to a profiteering corporation based on another continent.

Instead of being the governor that helps secure the first bottling plant of its kind in the Pacific Northwest with all of its accompanying ills, be the governor that sustains Oregon's natural resource future by telling Nestlé that giving away our water for corporate profit is not congruent with Oregon's progressive stewardship.

Nathan Smith
Hood River

Pass Trade act

Duckwall Fruit was established in 1919, and has been a leading exporter of fresh pears to customers across the world. In fact, we established our first overseas business partnership in the 1920s with a small importer based in Stockholm, Sweden. Today, we continue to export our pears to Sweden and many countries throughout the world. When we sell our fruit, we can proudly state it was grown in the Hood River Valley of Oregon.

For our business to continue to grow and thrive, we need to continue selling our agriculture products overseas. That means we need new trade deals that open up markets to

Oregon businesses. I applaud Senator Wyden for the work he has done to date supporting Trade Promotion. Duckwall Fruit has been trading with countries for almost one hundred years. We want to continue selling our great produce for another one hundred, and that is why we need Congress to pass Trade Promotion Authority.

Fred Duckwall
President, Duckwall Fruit
Hood River

For Fenner

I am writing to ask you to vote for Guy Fenner for Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC) Board of Education.

Most of you are aware that the finances of our community college are a disaster. The Board has been unresponsive to the questions, input, and grievances from staff and faculty and students. Their "solution" to the financial situation is to cut student services and class offerings, and to raise tuition. How can they be trusted to navigate the future of our community college education when they have been irresponsible with the past?

Guy is promising to be thoughtful and responsive to communication from the individuals most affected by the current financial environment at the school. He is committed to Hood River and to the provision of an excellent community college for our students. This college is an amazing resource for Hood River! He is ready to provide new leadership and ideas. It is time to support him and others like him.

Sudeep Burman
Hood River

Special thanks

Our son, Brian McClure, died on April 9 while biking on the Dog River Trail. He was a resident of Hood River and Parkdale for many years and loved the area. We want to thank the Hood River police department, especially Deputy Mark Smith, for the efforts they made to secure his possessions and his car and to guide us through the difficult process of recovering it. Also we are grateful to the Parkdale volunteer fire department in their efforts. We were shown nothing but kindness and compassion from everyone we dealt with. You have a wonderful town and we will never forget how well we were treated.

Delbert and Marie McClure
Bellevue, Wash.

'David and Goliath'

In order for the Republican presidential candidate to actually win the 2016 election ... he or she must stress and overemphasize a new "David and Goliath" approach. In this day and age, the Republican nominee has to not only go up

against the Democrat candidate, but also the large as a barge mainstream media, who were impressively instrumental in reserving an Oval Office position in 2008 and 2012. I believe this "David and Goliath" approach repeatedly and forcefully expressed might actually awaken the low information voters, who get most of their knowledge from the likes of Jon Stewart, David Letterman and other late night celebrities.

Bill Davis
Hood River

For North, Behrmann

Please note: Next week, when you receive your mail in ballot, "scroll" down to: Hood River County Transportation District ... Note ... Vote for three.

I endorse two candidates for Columbia Area Transit Board of Director's positions: Theresa North, whose name will appear on the ballot, and Otto Behrmann, whose name won't appear and must be entered as a write-in candidate. Therefore, below Theresa's name, write in the name Otto Behrmann on the blank line, then fill in the circle. (Otto also applied for the Board position that we chose Theresa to fulfill. He still desires to become a board member.)

Otto Behrmann's "Life Profile": Retired; lived in Oregon for 47 years (8 in Hood River); holds a degree in Mechanical Engineering; living in New York City taught Otto the value of "public transportation."

Work/volunteer services include: Worked with Reedsport City Council on their water system, then as their coordinator with ODOT to lay out a bicycle path through their town; SMART volunteer in Albany and Hood River; Volunteer for FISH.

Please join with me supporting Otto and Theresa for the CAT Board of Directors positions.

Alan Winans
Hood River

Vinyl here in the Gorge

Hooray for you — so glad you appreciate vinyl LPs — so glad you love music.

Here we are in an area that encourages community and supporting local businesses, and all you could come up with for a local source for vinyl LPs is a couple of thrift shops in Hood River and a photo of a record store in Eugene, no less. When right here in the Gorge we have an amazing source for vinyl and CDs — Yesterday and Today Records in The Dalles for 25 years — but oops, it's not Hood River, is it.

You need to get out in your community, news editor.

Karen Becker Smith
Lyle, Wash.



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