

SCHOOL: 'We do not have a revenue problem; we have a commitment problem'

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able to earmark more from the tax-supported general fund with a rising economy.

"We do not have a revenue problem; we have a commitment problem," Davis said. "When will it ever be enough to make that commitment?"

Reached Tuesday afternoon, Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe said she and her administration were already meeting to discuss potential budget cuts.

Sipe said she will have to cut staff to meet the more than \$650,000 in cuts the district will have to make if it doesn't get any more state funding.

Umatilla school officials have already cut programming to the bone and are now just trying to find a way to meet the state's minimum requirement.

"We're hacking off limbs," she said.

In Pendleton, Superintendent Jon Peterson said his district would also be in "budget cutting mode."

While specific cuts wouldn't be discussed until

the budget is formulated over the next couple of months, Peterson said school programs could be adversely affected.

Local administrators weren't assuaged by the possibility of more money coming through the May revenue forecast.

According to Peterson and Sipe, by the time schools received the extra money, districts would be left with no time to recruit or rehire teachers.

The local district best poised to weather the budget is the Hermiston School District.

Because of Hermiston's expanding student population, Superintendent Fred Maiocco said the district has enough funding to avoid staff layoffs.

Still, Maiocco called the state budget "woefully inadequate" while adding that decreased professional development and increased class sizes could happen as a result.

As a member of the Ways and Means Committee, state Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, has already voted against the

proposed education budget.

Hansell said he'll vote against it again when it arrives on the senate floor unless the budget is raised to \$7.5 million.

The senator said he is a part of a "superminority" of Republicans in the Legislature that have taken the unusual route of proposing a larger education budget than their Democratic counterparts.

Hansell said Republicans are pushing for a larger budget because of the state's recent woes in educational performance.

"Oregon is in a world of hurt," he said.

The Oregon Education Association, the state's largest teachers' union, has not endorsed a dollar amount. But its president said lawmakers should fund current operations before new initiatives such as increased spending on early childhood education, reading skills, and school-to-work and high school completion programs.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

GEM: Old roof comes off in June

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some of the smaller projects using grants and money donated by community members, said board member Sam Pambrun. They replaced an outside brick wall, gutted the theater and replaced the saloon's façade. Now, with a \$400,000 infusion, they can forge ahead with the really big-ticket items such as replacing the flat leak-prone roof and moving a wall 30 feet out to accommodate a stage, fly space and dressing rooms. In late 2013, the Ford Family Foundation awarded a \$200,000 matching grant to the group. In March, the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust provided the needed \$200,000 match.

Pambrun, who like

Hansell had his first date at the Gem, is nostalgic about the old theater where he saw "King Kong" and munched popcorn. He remembers Dugger keeping the young moviegoers in line.

"He policed the place," Pambrun said. "He didn't yell, but if you were making noise, he would crook his finger at you."

Nostalgia, though, will only get you so far. There's also hours of study, discussion and planning — not to mention the sweat and sore muscles from physical labor. McIntyre, who teaches music at Weston-McEwen High School, orchestrates the action.

"Rob — he's the one who makes things happen," Pambrun said.

The new theater will

include touches of the old. Sixty original balcony seats were removed and restored. An art deco clock advertising Folsom Funeral Home will go back on the wall. The original project equipment will be on display.

But, first, there's a lot of work to be done. The old roof will come off in June. Volunteers, McIntyre said, are welcome.

"We're looking for muscle," he said.

To view drawings of the future Gem and learn more, go to www.gemtheater.org. The group continues to raise funds through the sale of pavers engraved with up to 50 characters for \$125.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

ENVIRONMENT: Republican-controlled House from 1990-2006

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The environmental lobby does have several advantages, including strength in numbers and strong support from Democratic lawmakers this session. At least 55 registered lobbyists represent environmental interests in Oregon, and most are employees of the groups they represent and do other work in addition to lobbying. In addition, Splitt said there are pro-environment majorities in both chambers.

Environmentalists did not always enjoy such a strong position in Oregon. The Oregon Conservation Network formed 20 years ago at a time when environmentalists spent a lot of time fighting bills aimed at undermining "good" legislation passed in the 1970s, Splitt said. Republicans had control of the House from 1990 to 2006, and the Senate from 1994 to 2002.

"I think folks were feeling pretty frustrated with bad bills passing," and decided to create a coalition to focus on shared priorities, Splitt said. "The group organized at the time pretty much played defense."

A decade ago, the coalition decided to stop playing defense and begin proposing more new legislation. Rhett Lawrence, conservation director for the Oregon chapter of the Sierra Club and a reg-

istered lobbyist for the group, said coalition members started to come up with annual lists of bills they could agree upon called "priorities for a healthy Oregon."

The environmental lobby's top priorities today are two bills they describe as "coal to clean": Senate Bill 477 and House Bill 2729.

Both would require utilities to stop generating or purchasing electricity from coal power plants by 2025. The Senate version would also require companies to replace coal power with electricity from sources "at least 90 percent cleaner than coal-derived generating resources," according to a legislative summary.

Splitt said other priorities this year include a bill to require private forestland owners to provide notice to the state and keep other records of their use of pesticides, a bill to appropriate money for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to spend on conservation and legislation that would allow the state to end a mandate to generate revenue from timber harvests on some public forests.

Environmental groups are also pushing for the passage of legislation that would preserve or create incentives for a range of solar projects, from residential to utility scale facilities. Lawrence said solar energy "still needs a little bit of a hand in the next step in

putting it on a level playing field with fossil fuel."

Splitt said environmental groups also want money for public transit to be included in any funding package for street maintenance and other transportation projects. The outlook for that package is unclear, since Republicans stopped participating in talks after Democrats passed the low-carbon fuel bill.

Some groups lobbying on the coal power bills and other environmental issues are not strictly environmental groups.

Bob Jenks, executive director of the Citizens Utility Board of Oregon, said the group supports the coal legislation because governments will eventually regulate carbon emissions and ratepayers could save money if utilities begin to more aggressively reduce carbon now.

FREEDOM: Wants to clarify law by end of the week

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Last week, Indiana Gov. Mike Pence signed the state Religious Freedom Restoration Act, giving heightened protections to businesses and individuals who object on religious grounds to providing certain services. The law triggered a swift and intense backlash from gay rights supporters, businesses such as Apple, and some states, which barred government-funded travel to Indiana.

Critics of the law say the intent is to discriminate against gays. They fear,

for example, that caterers, florists, photographers and bakers with religious objections to same-sex marriage will be allowed to refuse to do business with gay couples. Supporters of the law say it will only give religious objectors a chance to bring their case before a judge.

On Tuesday, Pence said he wants the Legislature to present him a bill by the end of the week clarifying that the new law does not allow discrimination against gays.

Pence said he does not believe lawmakers intended

"to create a license to discriminate." But he added: "I can appreciate that that's become the perception, not just here in Indiana but all across the country."

Douglas Laycock, a constitutional scholar at the University of Virginia Law School who helped win passage of the 1993 federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, said no one has ever successfully used such laws to override nondiscrimination statutes. He expressed frustration that gay rights advocates seem to be ignoring this in their attack on the Indiana law.



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