

SCHOOL: HHS shut down Thursday due to a water line break

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“We’re not going to marginalize safety at all,” he said.

Despite experiencing no construction delays, the Hermiston School District is also trying to stay ahead of the minimum number of hours.

Hermiston High School lost out on instruction time Thursday when a water line break caused by the cold weather spurred school administrators to send students home early.

Although officials were planning to keep the high school closed Friday while workers cleaned the flooded areas, significant snow fall closed schools district-wide.

A Friday press release states that workers were able to limit the damage caused by flooding and school is scheduled to resume Monday, with only two classrooms inaccessible to students while they continue to dry.

Tricia Mooney, Hermiston’s assistant superintendent of human resources, said the district will schedule a district-wide make-up day later in the year.

While district officials haven’t set on a day yet, Mooney said the higher threshold for high school students — 990 hours per year for grades 9-11 and 900 for 12th graders — means they always have to pay

close attention to that level.

At the heart of the matter is the department of education’s recent efforts to boost the state’s instructional hours, which are below the national average.

Besides increasing the number instructional hours, the state narrowed the definition of what constituted an instructional hour.

The 2016-2017 school year was the first that the department prohibited school districts from classifying up to 14 hours of inclement weather as instructional hours.

That means there might be a need for the same kind of re-scheduling for schools in the more snow-averse Eastern Oregon region in upcoming years.

“It might be a recurring conversation,” Mooney said.

Mooney said Hermiston isn’t at the point of considering a waiver, but it will have to keep an eye on professional development hours, which were also removed from the list of activities that could be considered instructional hours.

Both Pendleton and Hermiston instituted late starts and early releases in 2013 to give teachers more professional development time.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

SICK: Lin County already provides paid sick time to more than 95 percent of its employees

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Gov. Kate Brown is named as a defendant in the lawsuit, but the Department of Justice will ultimately decide whether to appeal the ruling, said Chris Pair, a spokesman in the Governor’s Office.

“Gov. Brown carefully reviewed the paid sick leave bill before signing it and disagrees with the court’s decision,” Pair said in an emailed statement.

The law, passed in the 2015 legislative session, requires employers with at least 10 employees to offer 40 hours of sick leave each year. Employers with fewer staff members are required to provide the same amount of unpaid sick time.

Linn, Douglas, Jefferson, Malheur, Morrow, Polk, Sherman, Wallowa and Yamhill counties challenged the requirement in May. Linn County already provides paid sick time to more than 95 percent of its

employees, Nyquist said. County commissioners, however, objected to providing the benefit to temporary and seasonal park and fair employees. Doing so would have cost the county on order of \$40,000 per year, Nyquist said.

Nyquist said he hopes the ruling will give lawmakers pause when they consider passing future measures that would cost counties more money.

“The is a comprehensive effort on our part to proactively manage our budget going forward,” Nyquist said. “You get to that place where you have that gap, and you are cutting positions or asking taxpayers for more money. We think the taxpayers are not in the mood to be receptive to those requests, and we have had for a number of years, the legislature introducing and sometimes passing measures that had financial consequences and didn’t track with the constitutional amendment.”

Senate backs stop-gap spending bill

Government shutdown averted

WASHINGTON (AP) — With less than hour to spare, the Senate late Friday backed legislation averting a government shutdown as coal-state Democrats retreated on long-term health care benefits for retired miners but promised a renewed fight for the working class next year.

The vote was 63-36 and sent the stop-gap spending bill to President Barack Obama for his signature ahead of a midnight deadline.

It came hours after Democrats dropped threats to block the measure in hopes of using the shutdown deadline to try to win a one-year respite for 16,500 miners facing the loss of health care benefits at year’s

end. Instead, the legislation provides benefits at a cost of \$45 million for four months.

Democrats evoked President-elect Donald Trump, a working class hero in coal country, in pressing for more benefits. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., a potential member of the Trump Cabinet, led the fight of coal-state Democrats.

But House Republicans were unrelenting — and had already vacated the Capitol for a three-week holiday — forcing Democrats to concede. Manchin acknowledged Friday night that he did not have the votes to block the bill, but said “the fight will continue” next year.

The fight gave Democrats, who suffered devastating election losses a month ago at the hands of working-class voters, a chance to cast them-

selves and not the GOP as the champion of the common man. Manchin was joined by other coal-state Democrats who face re-election in 2018 in states Donald Trump won last month, including Pennsylvania and Ohio.

“We’re just getting warmed up,” said Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., vowing a fight next year. “These miners and their families kept their promise, put their lives at risk. ... It’s not too difficult for a senator or House member to keep a promise.”

The dispute over health benefits and a separate fight over controversial legislation to shift more of California’s scarce water resources to inland farmers were the final battles of a two-year session marked by constant quarreling. It was capped by a

burst of productivity on legislation to authorize hundreds of water projects, repair Flint, Michigan’s lead-tainted water system, and keep the government running through April.

Congress will take a break before reconvening on Jan. 3 to get a swift start on repealing key elements of the Affordable Care Act and confirming Trump’s Cabinet.

The underlying funding bill would keep the government running through April 28 to buy time for the incoming Trump administration and Congress to wrap up more than \$1 trillion in unfinished agency budget work. It also provides war funding, disaster aid for Louisiana and other states, and an expedited process for considering Trump’s nominee for defense secretary, retired Gen. James Mattis.

CAREVAN: The two vans travel an average of 1,500-2,000 miles each month

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tubing and handed over her pink floral cane. Ruhl set her Nikes on the footrest and Miller wheeled her inside, oxygen tank trailing behind them. After an hour of rehab, Ruhl would be ready to return home.

The former school and prison nurse is one of about 10 people who use the CareVan each week. It’s been a decade since Good Shepherd launched the service. The mission was straightforward — helping patients get to their appointments at Good Shepherd-related facilities.

“Good Shepherd realized one of the biggest problems people in our service area face is getting to their medical appointments,” said Care Van supervisor Cindy Schaan.

Ruhl can relate.

“It was a problem for me since I don’t drive anymore,” she said. “I don’t have a car.”

“The Care Van is designed for people who have no other way to get here,” said Pat Ward, driver and office assistant. “If they don’t have any other option, they call us.”

The amount of demand for the free service surprised even the organizers.

“We realized within three or four months’ time that one van was not going to cut it,” Schaan said. “Within a couple of years we switched to a two-van operation.”

Each van is covered in a wrap that depicts a roadway winding through a wide-open Eastern Oregon vista. The vans together travel an average of 1,500-2,000 miles each month throughout the hospital’s West Umatilla and North Morrow County service area, which encompasses Hermiston, Irrigon, Stanfield, Echo, Umatilla, Boardman and Hat Rock.

Shera Hopper, a paid employee who drives and serves as office assistant along with Ward, said clients



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Bill Reynolds started using the CareVan service three years ago due to health issues and is a frequent rider with the service.

“It’s more than just a ride. It’s a service with a heart behind it.”

— **Shera Hopper**, CareVan employee who drives and serves as office assistant

are young and old and come with a variety of physical issues.

“There is a misconception that this program is only for the elderly and permanently disabled,” Hopper said. “If you fall and break your wrist, we’re here for you.”

Bill Reynolds, who is blind, is a regular rider. The van picks him up three times a week downtown after yoga class. Reynolds quit driving in 1984 after a progressive eye disease made it unsafe. After a heart attack three years ago coincided with vision problems experienced by his wife, the retired agricultural engineer began

using the service to get to his cardiac rehab appointments. His yellow lab guide dog, Nexus, accompanies him.

“The driver drops the ramp and Nexus walks up with me in tow,” Reynolds said. “He leads me into the back area of the van and settles down on the floor.”

Both Ruhl and Reynold are on a first-name basis with the drivers.

“They are on time and very pleasant and accommodating,” Reynolds said. “I haven’t found a cross one yet.”

Hopper and Ward said they become friends with their passengers.

“We get to where they are not a transport,” Ward said. “They’re a friend we’re giving a ride.”

“You visit. You hear the stories,” Hopper said. “There are some amazing stories.”

Hopper said the service can be a needed human connection and bright spot in someone’s day.

“It’s more than just a ride,” she said. “It’s a service with a heart behind it.”

Funding comes from private donations, Good Shepherd Health Care System, Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation, Wildhorse Foundation, Oregon Department of Transportation, Paul Parish Ltd. and the Good Shepherd Medical Foundation.

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

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