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EAST OREGONIAN

FEBRUARY 4-5, 2017

141st Year, No. 80

WINNER OF THE 2016 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50



BMCC freshman Laura Dewey takes notes during a writing 115 class on Thursday at the BMCC campus in Hermiston.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

PERS bill comes due at high cost

State is \$22B in debt on its pension obligations

By **JEFF MAPES**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

In the 1990s, Oregon let public pension benefits get out of hand, and now this decades-old mistake is returning to haunt the state's taxpayers, schoolchildren and younger government workers.

Like the slow spread of dry rot that leads to an expensive home repair, a scary bill is coming due.

Oregon is \$22 billion in debt on its pension obligations. Starting in July, public agencies are on track to pay nearly \$900 million more in pension rates over the next two years.

Two years later, rates are expected to rise by another billion or so. And then two years after that, by yet another billion.

"It will pervade any kind of city, county or state service you can think of," said John Tapogna, a Portland economist who has long warned of the coming financial tsunami.

"You're going to have students paying for it in classrooms that are larger. You're going to have the citizens paying for it because the ambulances don't show up quite as quickly. Or the police services aren't quite as responsive as they have been in the past," he added.

In the Beaverton School District, the state's third largest, the tab is an extra \$14 million next year. That's equal to the cost of about 140 teachers, said school board chair Ann Bryan.

"We're looking at budgets like this in a time of a growing economy in Oregon," she said. "So at the same time things are booming, and we would expect investments in our education system, as a school district we are looking at cuts."

Ironically, Oregon's pension problem deepened following the state's wild success at investing money on behalf of public employees. During the 1990s, the state's PERS fund earned an average of nearly 15 percent a year.

'We Created A Monster'

But here's the hitch. The system was originally designed to give career workers about half of what they were earning in their final years on the job. But PERS also offered workers another option. They could get a retirement based on investment returns credited to their accounts, and the board running PERS credited almost all of the gains to members.

Between 1990 and 2000, the fund earned an average of 14.75 percent a year, according to a special master's report for the Oregon Supreme Court. The PERS board

See PERS/10A

Exploring a changing landscape

Students discuss finding new experiences and viewpoints in higher education

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
and **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

Many students find that college is a learning experience that goes far beyond the walls of a classroom. Exposure to new places, people and ideas can be both a challenge and an exciting change. *The East Oregonian* caught up with students for its Promise and Potential series, all of whom started a new chapter of their lives during an unusually eventful, politically-charged year. Students weigh in on if — and how — college has changed their perspectives.

Cece Hoffman said she has long been sympathetic to causes associated with Native Americans, women's rights and the LGBT community, but Seattle still surprised her.

PROMISE & POTENTIAL

Editor's note: Promise & Potential is an ongoing series following young adults as they leave high school and head into the world.



Photo contributed by Cece Hoffman

Cece Hoffman, center, poses with her University of Washington roommates Sydney Kane, left, and Sasha Savenko at the Standing Rock camp.

Hoffman, a Pendleton High School graduate and a University of Washington freshman, said it took a while to adjust to Seattle's openly liberal politics compared to the conservative confines of Pendleton.

But Hoffman has adjusted and become involved, especially following the election of President Donald Trump.

"It felt like everyone was mourning,"

she said. "It was really dark."

After the election, Hoffman, an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, traveled to the Standing Rock camp in North Dakota with her roommates to deliver supplies to the people protesting the construction of

See COLLEGE/10A

Communities reach out to growing Latino population



Jedwin Torres and Anthony Torres, both of Hermiston, eat shaved ice at the 2014 Cinco de Mayo festival in downtown Hermiston.

EO file photo

Up from 8 percent in 2000 to about 12 percent in 2017

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Oregon's Latino population continues to grow, and it's spurring communities to improve their outreach.

A report by the Oregon Community Foundation titled "Latinos in Oregon" estimates 12 percent of the state's population is now Latino, compared to 8 percent in 2000.

In some Eastern Oregon communities, the growth has been even more rapid.

Umatilla School District superintendent Heidi Sipe said 65 percent of her students are Latino and 70 percent

have a mixed ethnic background. In 2001, 42 percent of the district's students were Latino.

"What families need at 42 percent Hispanic is far difference than what they need at 70 percent Hispanic," Sipe said. "We're always adjusting."

She said the district publishes all of its communications in English and Spanish, and provides translators at parent nights and other events.

Being Latino is about more than speaking Spanish, however. The Latinos in Oregon report notes that according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, about half of Oregon's Latino population is bilingual to the point that they speak English

See LATINO/10A



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