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As deadline looms, no clear PERS plan

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — With a legislative deadline less than two weeks away, it's not yet clear what legislators may propose this session to reduce the costs of the state's public pension system.

The chair of the senate committee

vetting proposals that would affect the Public Employees Retirement System said Wednesday that there is no specific policy proposal edging out others.

"Right now, I would say that all of them are up for discussion at this point," Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, said. "That's the climate that we're in, we're still

talking about all of the different proposals."

Committees vetting policy, such as the Senate Workforce Committee, have to schedule work sessions on bills by Friday. April 18 is the last day bills can move out of committee in the chamber where they are proposed.

As of Wednesday evening, some

proposals that have taken center stage in the public process in the first two months of the legislative session — such as capping the salary amount used in calculating benefits to \$100,000, or calculating an employee's final average salary over five rather than three years — were not scheduled for a work session, according to the state's

legislative information system.

Workforce Committee Vice Chair Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, said Monday that those two ideas — contained in bills he has sponsored — seemed to have momentum. But he also said that other proposals are still "on the table."

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Dispatch will start allowing 9-1-1 texts

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Umatilla County residents will be able to start texting emergency dispatchers later this year after the county commission approved purchase of software to allow text messages to be sent to 9-1-1.

Dispatch commander Kathy Lieuallen told the commission that residents will still be encouraged to call instead of text when they can, as information can be relayed more quickly that way. But texting 9-1-1 will be an additional tool for people who are hearing impaired, experiencing a medical emergency that prevents them from speaking or in a situation where they would be in danger if they were heard calling for police.

"I think this is a great service for the hearing impaired or deaf community," she said.

Lieuallen said the state is working on a statewide system, but until then has agreed to pay the full cost of interim measures, including the software the commission approved. The invoice for installation will go directly to the state.

Lieuallen said when the launch is ready, her office will work to educate the public on its use.

"The message is always call if you can, text if you can't," she said.

On Wednesday the commission also gave the final approval for leases between the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center and the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo.

Under the terms of the 50-year leases, the fair will pay \$10,000 per year for use of the fairgrounds for a month each summer, while the rodeo will pay \$10,000 per year for use of the rodeo arena during fair week plus access at other times for maintenance and preparation. The rodeo board will also pay \$500 per year for year-round use of

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HERMISTON



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston Chamber of Commerce director Debbie Pedro, right, and Kelly Schwirse take phone calls Tuesday in the office at the Hermiston Conference Center.

Chamber to relocate

City will take over Hermiston Conference Center in 2018

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce is looking to move downtown after being notified that the city does not plan to renew the chamber's contract for running the Hermiston Conference Center in 2018.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said a detailed plan for having the city's parks and recreation department take over operation of the conference center will be presented

to the city council at a future meeting for their approval. He said the plan would continue the building's use as a conference center, but would see it run directly by city staff instead of through a contract with the chamber.

In a news release, chamber leadership asked members to keep in mind that "the chamber is a separate business from the conference center, and there will always be a Greater Hermiston Chamber

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The City of Hermiston is currently in the process of remodeling the basement of the old Carnegie Library and has offered the chamber that space rent free.

McGee remembered in green

Rainbow owner loved racing cars, reading Irish verse

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

Not many were more Irish than Steve McGee.

The gregarious owner of the Rainbow Café, who died last Wednesday at age 76, loved all things Ireland. He

donned a Kelly green top hat on St. Patrick's Day and opened the annual daylong celebration at the bar by reciting some Irish verse.

"Then he would say, 'Let's drink,'" said Betty Adair, who has worked at the Rainbow going on 36 years.

McGee spent each St. Paddy's Day presiding over the happy scene, which included a short-lived but

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Photo by Ryan Krusee

Steve McGee drives along the freeway just south of Sacramento three years ago in his 1953 Chevy. McGee, who had a passion for restoring cars, didn't quite complete the Chevy. A group of car friends dubbed the Dirty Dozen will finish the job and take it to car shows on McGee's behalf.



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