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Budget gap may bring big cuts to health care

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — With about a month to go before a critical revenue forecast, Oregon's budget writers released a more detailed list of cuts Monday to address the state's approximately \$1.6 billion budget gap if new revenue isn't raised.

The cuts are across the board and intended to show what it would take to balance the state's budget. For example, about 350,000 Oregonians would no longer be eligible for coverage under the recent Affordable Care Act Medicaid expansion, and a ballot measure to require the state to pay dropout prevention, college readiness, and career and technical education for high school students would only be partially funded.

The co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means released a similar document in January, with fewer specifics. Since then, subcommittees have been working on different areas of the state's budget to figure out where agencies and programs could be cut to make those targets.

Lawmakers face an approximately \$1.6 billion gap between what the state is expected to realize in revenue and what it would take to pay to maintain existing services.

"The goal of the list is to move the

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"If you look at those reduction lists, Oregonians are going to see things that they care about on those lists. And without new revenue, we don't have a lot of options."

— **Tina Kotek**,
Speaker of the House, D-Portland

HERMISTON



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston resident Bryan Wolfe reads a statement imploring the Hermiston City Council to consider the will of the people of Hermiston before voting on the fate of the Hermiston Conference Center at a special session city council meeting Tuesday in Hermiston.

Council votes to take over conference center operations

Chamber of commerce will move to new location in 2018

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The city of Hermiston will take over operation of the Hermiston Conference Center and the Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce will move to a new location in 2018.

The city council voted 6-0 in favor of the plan during a special

meeting Tuesday night after hearing testimony from a standing-room only crowd that spilled out into the lobby of city hall.

All but one of the public comments was against the plan to some degree, including several current and past chamber board members and ambassadors who said they were disappointed to see how strained the relationship

between the chamber and city had become.

"At one time we were looked at as a valued and trusted partner," chamber board chair Shirley Parsons said.

City councilors and staff said they had a great respect for the chamber's value to the community and the "excellent" job that the chamber was doing. They said

it was a problem of finances and using all city facilities as effectively as possible.

"It's a question of resources," city councilor John Kirwan said.

The Hermiston Conference Center was created when the city purchased an old Safeway building in 1994 and the community raised \$600,000 to renovate it. The city has been paying the chamber of commerce to run the

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UMATILLA

After-school classes inspire experiments

STEM Academy is free of charge to participate

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

Even though the final bell rings at 2:50 p.m., more than half of Umatilla's students stay for more.

The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Academy of Umatilla offers classes

after school Monday through Thursday for all of Umatilla's students, grades K-12, and many students stay back to learn about things they don't get to do during normal class hours. The program is free to all Umatilla students and is entirely federally funded.

Those things can include horticulture, drama, robotics, cooking and many other subjects.

"Over half the K-12 population does the after-school program," said Umatilla Superintendent Heidi Sipe. "Over 700 attended last year, and we

had 500 regular attendees — that's kids who took two programs or more."

Each program is a minimum of six weeks, and many are taught by high school students who have to go through training and an internship to be qualified to teach the class.

Umatilla's robotics program is the cornerstone of the STEM Academy, with classes at the elementary, middle and high school levels. But there are many other types of classes, as well.

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Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

Middle-school students in the STEM Academy of Umatilla work on a project in the after-school robotics class.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Flash storm strikes Pendleton

A truck drives through a pool of standing water at the corner of Northwest Fourth Street and Despain Avenue after an afternoon thunderstorm inundated the area with heavy rain Tuesday in Pendleton.

PENDLETON

Council declines sanctuary city status

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

The City Council took no action on the mostly symbolic measure of making Pendleton a sanctuary city.

At a Tuesday meeting, city resident Shaindel Beers asked the council to declare Pendleton a sanctuary city by adopting an American Civil Liberties Union-endorsed list of nine policies and rules that limited local police cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.

Beers' request only drew public

support from city councilor Scott Fairley, whose motion to adopt the policies died from a lack of a second.

In her presentation, Beers said that although Oregon is already considered a "sanctuary state," adopting the ACLU's policies and rules would send a message to undocumented immigrants that Pendleton was a safe and inclusive place.

"A scared population isn't a safe population," she said. "If we can make people feel safe and

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