

Pay equity bill heads to Gov. Brown's desk

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A state pay equity bill is headed to Gov. Kate Brown's desk, after the House of Representatives on Monday, May 22, confirmed Senate changes to the legislation.

The bill allows workers who are victims of pay inequity to recover up to two years of back pay by filing a complaint with the Bureau of Labor and Industries.

The governor is expected to sign the bill next week.

"I applaud the Legislature's bipartisan efforts to pass the Pay

Equity Bill and I look forward to signing House Bill 2005 into law. While workforce discrimination has long been illegal, pay inequity persists. House Bill 2005 makes great strides towards a more equitable and prosperous Oregon," Gov. Brown said Monday.

Senators amended the House bill to win support from the business community, which had previously opposed stiff penalties in the original bill.

The safeguard applies to women and all other protected classes, including minorities, older people and people with disabilities. The bill also prohibits employers

from asking a job candidate for wage or salary history.

The amended bill provides a phased-in effective date and removes punitive damages when employers can show they have conducted a pay equity analysis in the past three years and made progress toward equal pay.

Another concession allows unequal pay when the inequity results from an employer paying a worker more to match another employer's offer.

An analysis of state executive branch salaries and wages by the Center for Public Service showed a consistent pattern of pay gaps

between men and women and minorities and non-minorities. Women were estimated to earn \$380 less a month than men, the analysis showed.

The House passed the original bill March 28 by a 36-to-24 vote. The Senate unanimously approved the amended bill May 17, after the bill's sponsors negotiated changes with businesses and advocates.

"We are paving the way today and showing people we can come together in a bipartisan way to pass a stellar piece of legislation," said Rep. Jodi Hack, R-Salem.

Once the governor signs the bill, it becomes law.

Oregon State Parks auctioning off 38-acre woodland

By **DYLAN DARLING**
The Register-Guard

EUGENE — In a rare move, Oregon State Parks will auction off a 38-acre piece of property between Eugene and Corvallis with a stand of tall Douglas fir trees.

Once a wayside, or rest stop, along Highway 99 West near Monroe, the woodland will go up for sale this summer, according to State Parks spokesman Chris Havel. The agency more often trades land and rarely sells it outright.

"Right now, the market is such that we could really get some good out of it for the rest of the park

system by putting it out for sale," he said.

High levels of iron and nitrates in the groundwater at the site polluted the drinking water, and the septic systems at the wayside failed 10 years ago, the state said. State Parks then had the building torn down. Officials decided in 2012 to dispose of the land. They first offered it to other state agencies but found none interested.

So the agency is taking the uncommon step of offering the land for sale to the public through an auction, Havel said. State Parks will take bids this summer.

The land is worth an estimated \$356,000, according to a January

appraisal.

Since 2001, State Parks has disposed of 3,600 acres, with the last auction in 2008 when the agency sold a parcel at the Oregon State Fairgrounds in Salem. Havel said money from such sales goes into a fund used to buy land.

In the past 16 years, State Parks' overall holdings have gone up from 93,000 acres to 108,000 acres.

Most of the land at the wayside, nearly 31 acres, is in Lane County and is zoned by the county for park and recreation use. The rest of the land, about 7 acres, is in Benton County and zoned for exclusive farm use.

Given that the property

is outside any urban growth boundary and has restrictive zoning, it's unclear what the land could be used for.

Harvesting the timber on the land is an option for the buyer, Havel said.

"That's where most of the value is in the property," he said. "It's in those trees."

The trees vary from a few dozen feet tall to 175 feet high, and the stand includes maple and ponderosa pines along with the Douglas fir.

The state bought the land in 1926 from William and Mae Washburne and long called it the Washburne Wayside, Havel said.

SCHOOL: About 74 percent of graduating seniors have committed to post-secondary education

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she said.

The "Signing Day" idea at Umatilla was started by Tia Sepulveda, the school's Gear Up coordinator, who got the idea from another district. Traditionally a ceremony for students committing to play a sport in college, Umatilla's "signing day" celebrated all students moving on to further education.

"The kids are excited," Sepulveda said. "They're nervous. They didn't realize this was such a big deal. The goal is to get them excited and to want to pursue higher education."

Brenda Campos will go on to Blue Mountain Community College with about 20 of her classmates. She will serve as a student ambassador while she studies nursing. Student ambassadors show high school students and visitors around the school and receive a scholarship each term.

"I think it's amazing," Campos said. "The younger kids can see an example of what they can achieve."

Steven Ebker, student body president and a senior who will attend Oregon State University, agreed.

"I love that the other freshmen, many even freshmen, are really proud of their friends," he said. "Especially with somebody being recognized, they know there are people who care about their education."

Ebker said he had been



Students from Clara Brownell Middle School and Umatilla High School watch as graduating seniors declare the colleges they plan on attending during a signing day ceremony Tuesday in Umatilla.

"I love that the other students, many even freshmen, are really proud of their friends."

— **Steven Ebker**, student body president and a senior who will attend OSU

encouraged to take advantage of the many opportunities available in high school.

"The clubs, scholarship opportunities — those really motivated me to get to this point," he said.

Before the students introduced themselves, Sipe addressed the school, and encouraged younger students to talk to their peers.

"For years we've talked to you about what steps you

should take," she said. "Today we have the chance to see a whole group of students who know exactly what they're doing next year. Take a moment and talk to these seniors about what college they're going to, and how they choose it."

Though the afternoon mainly celebrated students' academic accomplishments, the students also witnessed a dance-off between the

Blue Mountain Community College mascot, a timber wolf, and Umatilla High School's mascot, a viking. It wasn't much of a contest, though, with the viking soon slinking off the stage as the wolf tore up the gym floor, much to students' amusement.

Of Umatilla High School's 74 graduating seniors, 55 have already committed to post-secondary education of some kind, about



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The Umatilla Viking and Timber, the BMCC mascot, compete in a dance off during a signing day ceremony on Tuesday in Umatilla.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Seniors sign their letters of intent during a signing day ceremony Tuesday at Umatilla High School.

74 percent of the graduating class.

Along with the 20 students to attend BMCC, three will join the Air Force, and most others will attend one of Oregon's other state schools. Sipe noted that in this

group of graduating students, 15 or more had a 4.0 cumulative GPA or higher.

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WATER: The Central Project would have cost roughly \$14.4 million

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for patrons to invest in the project up front only to have it potentially stalled by legal challenges.

"The district is looking to defend this litigation for months to come," Levy explained to a room full of patrons who packed the Umatilla County Fire District 1 station on Westland Road. "If the plaintiffs are successful ... it disturbs the Central Project, and the Central Project will not work."

The Central Project would have cost roughly \$14.4 million, financed by patrons who agreed to buy the water. The state of Oregon also approved a funding package for water delivery projects during the 2015 Legislature,

with \$11 million earmarked for the basin.

However, according to the resolution passed Monday, the project as it was conceived depended on Westland's "longstanding water delivery and distribution practices" that are now being challenged in court. Plaintiffs in the case argue the district is in violation of Oregon's "first in time, first in right" water appropriation system.

Levy also said the lawsuit precluded Westland from applying for its share of state funding within the fixed time frame.

After reading over the resolution in silence, farmer Hoss Hodges, whose parents arrived in the district in 1968, could barely contain his frustration.

"This really interferes with our future," Hodges said after slamming the table with his hand.

Others were more subdued while lamenting what they described as a lost opportunity.

"We damn sure needed that Columbia River water," said Butch Shockman, who owns a small amount of land along Bridge Road in Hermiston.

The value of agricultural land in the Columbia Basin increases exponentially with irrigation. Without water, dryland crops such as wheat may yield around \$100 per acre. Add one acre-foot of water and that value grows to \$500 per acre; add three acre-feet, and the value rockets to \$5,000 per acre.

Patty Horn, whose family has owned Butter Creek Ranch in the district since the 1960s, said she is worried that without sufficient water in the future, her son will eventually inherit a sandlot.

"If I lose my water, my land become worthless," Horn said. "It took 30 years for us to get a shot at Columbia water. It's a shame to see it go over a few suing the district."

The lawsuit in question was filed by a group of patrons who, together, farm more than 1,650 acres with senior water rights that date back to 1903. They claim they are being cheated out of water to benefit three large farms with more than 5,000 acres, including Levy's L&L Farms, Amstad Farms and

Eagle Ranch, to the tune of \$2.9 million in damages.

Dixie Echeverria, who owns ELH LLC and is one of the plaintiffs on the case, said in a written statement that they have "grave concerns" about the management of the district. In his ruling, Judge Gillespie encouraged both sides to consider mediation.

"This case is not this court's first experience with a small district's members suing the special district they are members of," Gillespie wrote. "In very real terms, the district's costs are borne directly by all of its members in one way or another."

J.R. Cook, founder and director of NOWA, said it was painful to see the Central Project slip out of Westland's grasp. But he added that does

not mean the organization is ending its effort to secure bucket-for-bucket mitigated Columbia River water rights and pass them off to entities that can put them to use.

The overall vision includes three project areas, stretching from Boardman to east of Hermiston.

Cook said Westland had been positioned to be first in line to get a pipeline in the ground as one of those three projects. Instead, the NOWA board will explore other options.

"I think Westland is going to look back on this in five years and regret it," Cook said.

Contact **George Plaven** at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

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