



EAST OREGONIAN

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WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar



Kuper Bracher, 13, loads a trailer with a soft white wheat from a bank-out wagon on Tuesday in a field outside of Helix.

WHEAT HARVEST IN FULL SWING

Yields look significantly improved over 2016

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Sitting in the cab of a John Deere tractor overlooking golden hills of wheat, Kuper Bracher waited patiently Tuesday morning and watched as a pair of combine harvesters passed slowly in the distance.

This is the second year that Bracher, 13, has worked wheat harvest at the family farm north of Helix. His job is to drive the bank-out wagon, ferrying loads of grain from combines out in the field to delivery trucks bound for the storage elevator.

"It's either fast-paced or it's really, really slow," said Bracher, adjusting his camouflage baseball cap. "Right now, it's going pretty slow."

Soon enough, Bracher receives a call over the radio and shifts his massive rig into gear. Traversing uneven terrain, he moves carefully into position alongside the closest combine ready to empty its cargo.

The process requires Bracher to keep his

See WHEAT/8A



Bank-out wagon driver Casey Evans lines up to take a load of wheat from a combine as another combine harvest wheat in a field Tuesday outside of Helix.

"Personally, this is my vacation. If you make sure you have a good crew ... it makes it fun."

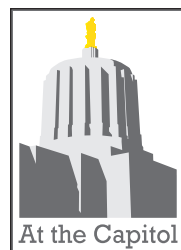
— **Randy Bracher, Helix wheat farmer**

Board to vote on change to PERS

Associated Press

SALEM — The board overseeing Oregon's public pension system is set to vote on whether to downgrade assumptions about how much return the system will get on its investments.

Changing the assumptions about returns on the investments that fund payments to public employees in retirement could increase the pension's unfunded liability from \$22 billion to \$50 billion, meaning that state agencies and school districts would have to put more money into the system in the coming years, *The Oregonian/OregonLive* reported. The decision would also impact employee benefits, employer benefits, public services and the state's long-term economic competitiveness.



At the Capitol

The Public Employees Retirement Systems Board currently assumes its investments will earn 7.5 percent annually. Market experts have said that is a gross overestimate that does not reflect the real size of today's underfunded public pension system and it minimizes required contributions from government employers. The state's actuary, Milliman Inc., estimates the board will make a 6.7 percent earning on its investments over the next two decades.

The board has voiced its intention of lowering the rate, but it is unclear by how much the rate will be lowered. Board member and Eugene businessman John Thomas said should the board vote for a rate higher than what is being recommended "we better have some very specific reasons and methodologies to back that up. I personally don't see where those changes would be."

Some employers support cutting employee benefits that they say are too generous as an alternative solution — in addition to lowering the assumptions.

"If they're trying to cover someone politically, stop it," said Jim Green, deputy executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association. "The system needs to be looked at and reformed, and keeping the assumed rate high, or using rate collars is just allowing policymakers at the state level to say, 'It's really not that bad.'"

If the board does not lower its assumption on Friday, Milliman has said it will flag the discrepancy in its next report card on the system. The action could cause hurt Oregon's credit rating.

PENDLETON

Post Office goes to cluster boxes on North Hill

In response to carriers being attacked by dogs

East Oregonian

Two angry dogs have changed the way some North Hill residents get their mail.

Kerry Schwartz, the postmaster at the U.S. Post Office in Pendleton, said two dog attacks last month spurred the organization to install two cluster boxes and forgo door-to-door delivery.

Schwartz said there is no imminent push in Eastern Oregon to convert door-to-door service to cluster boxes — a free-standing structure that contains several, individually locked mailboxes — but rather an attempt to keep their carriers safe.

Schwartz said cluster boxes are easier

for postal workers, who can stay near their truck when filling mailboxes.

"They can jump away into the truck faster than a dog can get to them" she said.

Because of the nearby dog attacks — one of which necessitated a trip to the hospital — the post office installed a 16-unit box at the corner of Northwest Furnish Avenue and Sixth Street, and another on Northwest Ninth Street. There is now a 24-unit cluster box on the corner of Furnish and Ninth and a 12-unit box on the corner of Ninth and Ellis.

Elderly or disabled residents who may have trouble navigating their way to a cluster box can contact the post office and ask for a "hardship delivery" that would resume direct delivery of the mail.

See MAIL/8A



The U.S. Postal Service is putting in cluster box mail boxes in neighborhoods in Pendleton on a case by case basis.

