Community colleges ask legislature for $32 million

East Oregonian

Oregon's community colleges are asking the legislature to allocate an additional $32 million to them during the upcoming short session.

The colleges say the extra funding would help mitigate tuition increases. Blue Mountain Community College increased tuition from $97 to $104 per credit for the 2017-2018 school year.

During the 2017 session the legislature appropriated $70 million more to public universities than the previous biennium, but only $6 million additional funding for community colleges, representing a 27 percent increase in general fund dollars going toward universities compared to a 13 percent increase for community colleges.

The state has seven universities and 17 community colleges.

"Lack of funding at the state level forces community colleges to place an unfair burden on the backs of students in the form of tuition increases," a news release from BMCC stated. "Community colleges already serve students with the greatest academic, financial and social challenges, but receive less per student in public funding than their university counterparts."

The college provided examples of ways it is already working to help students save money. Those efforts include programs, success coaches, faculty advisors and an early college credit connections coordinator all geared toward helping students only take courses necessary for their degree or certifications so they finish sooner and don't pay tuition on unnecessary classes.

"Investing in community colleges now will help colleges continue this path of profound change in how we serve students," the news release stated.

The 2018 legislative session begins Monday.

State hospital concludes Montwheeler unfit to stand trial

By LES ZAITZ
The (Malheur) Enterprise

VALE — Oregon State Hospital evaluators have concluded that Anthony W. Montwheeler is mentally unfit to stand trial, creating uncertainty about when he will be prosecuted on charges he stabbed to death an ex-wife and killed a Vale man in a collision during a police pursuit.

Montwheeler's attorney said in court filings last week that his client needs to be taken back to the state hospital and held for treatment until he can aid in his own defense.

Malheur County District Attorney David Goldthorpe said Friday that he would contest the fitness finding, setting up the potential for a court hearing that would explore Montwheeler's tangled criminal and mental health history.

Montwheeler, 50, is facing the death penalty if convicted of the aggravated murders in January 2017 of Annita Harmon, a Weiser woman once married to Montwheeler, and David Bates, killed while on his way to work in Ontario. Bates died and his wife Jessica was seriously injured when Montwheeler's pickup truck collided head on with the Bates rig south of Ontario.

State records disclosed after the crimes showed that in 1997 Montwheeler was put under state control after being judged guilty but insane of kidnapping his first wife and son. He was put under the jurisdiction of the state Psychiatric Security Review Board for 70 years. The board, however, freed Montwheeler early because he convinced the board he had been faking his mental illness all along to avoid prison.

A state psychiatrist in late 2016 said in a report relied on by the state board that he could find no sign Montwheeler was mentally ill despite years of treatment by state and local professionals.

Oregon officials have never publicly explained how Montwheeler could fool doctors for so long.

Montwheeler was freed three weeks before the murders.

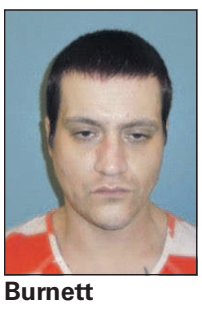
The immediate issue is whether Montwheeler has the mental capacity to understand his current legal circumstances.

State hospital officials on Jan. 11 filed a 37-page report of their evaluation, one that took nearly four months to produce when such reports are typically done in about three days, officials with the Oregon Health Authority said.

BRIEFLY

Milton-Freewater police catch robbery suspect

MILTON-FREEWATER — Milton-Freewater police Tuesday night arrested their suspect in two recent armed robberies of the same store.


Burnett

Police Chief Doug Boedigheimer reported Seth Andrew Burnett, 30, of Milton-Freewater, faces two counts of second-degree robbery and is in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton.

Two armed robberies took place Tuesday, Jan. 23, and Monday, Jan. 29, at the Neighborhood Market, 209 N.W. Eighth Ave., Milton-Freewater. Boedigheimer in a written statement said Burnett's arrest stemmed from his department's investigation into the crimes.

Photographic evidence from the store's security camera system helped identify Burnett as the suspect, according to Boedigheimer. Community members, including some directly associated with the store, helped as well.

Detectives caught up to Burnett a little after 9 p.m. while he was skateboarding on North Main Street near Eighth Avenue. Boedigheimer stated members of the local Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team assisted with the arrest and Burnett did not put up a fight.

Oregon state court records show Burnett has a citation from April 2017 for driving without a license and still owes $260 on that. Burnett also has two speeding citations from more than a decade earlier, but he has no criminal convictions.

Second-degree robbery carries a mandatory minimum prison sentence in Oregon of 70 months.

Former dispatcher loses certification over porn

MILTON-FREEWATER — A former Milton-Freewater police dispatcher lost his certification to work in Oregon.

Milton-Freewater hired Matthew Knight in 2016, and he graduated in July 2016 from the Oregon Public Safety Academy's two-week 911 training program. He quit his job last year in lieu of termination after an internal affairs investigation found he viewed pornographic websites while on duty, according to the Nov. 21 meeting minutes of the Telecommunications Policy Committee of the Board on Public Safety Standards and Training.

The committee found Knight repeatedly violated Milton-Freewater police policies and a "last chance agreement," and his misconduct involved misrepresentation and deceit. The committee voted 10-0 to send the matter to the Standards and Training board to take action on Knight's certification. The committee also voted 8-2 that Knight's dishonesty should ban him from working as a dispatcher for life.

The Board on Public Safety Standards and Training took up the matter Jan. 25 and voted to revoke Knight's certification.

Tax-Aide offers free help for eligible taxpayers

Beginning Feb. 1 and continuing through April 17, the AARP Foundation is providing free tax assistance and preparation through its Tax-Aide program.

Assistance through Tax Aide is not limited to older adults, said Joyce De Monnin, AARP Oregon communications director. Older adults, families and even college students who have low and moderate income levels are eligible for the free services. AARP membership is not required.

AARP volunteers are trained and IRS-certified each year to ensure they are aware of the latest changes to the U.S. Tax Code. People are encouraged to check the website for current information about available Tax-Aide program volunteers. Currently, the local schedule includes:

•Pendleton City Hall, 501 S.W. Emigrant Ave. Mondays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

•Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave. Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

•Boardman Senior Center, 100 Tatone St. Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information, including details on what documents to take to the Tax-Aide site, visit www.aarpfoundation.org/taxhelp or call 1-888-227-7669.

Traditional artists needed for apprentice program

EUGENE — To facilitate passing on tribal, cultural, religions and occupational traditions, people are sought to teach their art form to others.

The Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program offers participants a $3,000 stipend to teach their art form to apprentices in their communities. The program is offered through the Oregon Folklife Network.

They are seeking people accomplished in traditional folk arts, such as American Indian basket weaving and storytelling, old-time fiddling, saddle and western gear makers, specialty cooking and baking, African-American gospel singing, southeast Asian dancing, hip-hop artists and more. Oregonians engaged in living cultural traditions are encouraged to apply.

The program does not fund historic re-enactments, do-it-yourself crafts or those who practice traditions that are not part of their own cultural heritage.

Applications are due Thursday, March 1. For eligibility information, contact Brad McMullen at ofn@uoregon.edu, 541-346-3820 or visit http://ofn.uoregon.edu.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

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