Employers weighing benefits of PERS liability payments

Capital Bureau

SALEM — It's not yet clear how many of the state's public employers will use a new state program meant to address the state's public pension debt.

A little time, and a lot of math, stand between now and the answer.

Oregon has an unfunded public pension liability of about \$25.3 billion. Gov. Kate Brown has been seeking ways to pay down that debt, largely benefits already earned by retirees

that can't legally be altered.

A bill requested by Brown and passed by lawmakers in the recently concluded legislative session, Senate Bill 1566. established a special incentive fund. Qualifying public employers are to receive a match of 25 percent of a one time, lump-sum payment they make toward their share of the \$25.3 billion liability.

The bill also created a separate School Districts Unfunded Liability Fund, which will distribute money to a new account to help school districts offset growing PERS costs.

Both are funded by one-time revenue sources expected to generate about \$140 million — \$25 million for the match and \$115 million for the school fund.

Rob Boyett. legal counsel for the Association of Oregon Counties, says many counties are interested in the match program, though he has yet to hear of any who have decided whether to use it or not.

Bovett says the 25 percent match makes a difference in the face of skyrocketing percentage of payroll that public employers devote to PERS costs.

"With six years of really

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE dramatic employer rate increases, there is going to be a significant loss of public services, and this is a way to stem the tide," Bovett said.

It will also take some time for school districts to figure out whether the matching program will work for them, says Jim Green, executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association.

For a small or medium-sized district, the program could help to temper those dramatic rate increases from year to year say, instead of leaping from 26 percent of payroll to 33 percent, they might go from 26 to 30 percent.

"It's not just pure math," Green said. "It's also, what could we do in our district if we had that money that goes to that PERS increase?"

Under the new bill, public employers that want to get the matching funds would have to contribute a minimum of \$25,000.

That will mean that employers will also have to evaluate whether making the contribution to the matching fund is worth the cost of the contribution, Green said.

Green rattled off a list potential needs that \$25,000 could help pay for, especially in a small school district: a new part-time special education aide, career and technical education programming, a new school bus or roof.

"At each and every turn we need to do what will have a bigger impact on students," Green said.

Public employers will know more about whether the program suits them once PERS rates are set later this year, and more still in mid-2019, when the state's next two-year budget will be finalized.

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

Cougars euthanized in Silverton, The Dalles

Associated Press

Oregon wildlife officials euthanized two cougars this week, the first after sightings in Silverton that closed The Oregon Garden and the second in The Dalles that was found in an under construction hotel room.

The subadult cougar in Silverton had been spotted by a woman walking through the wetlands of the botanical garden, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife officials said. The site was closed Wednesday, and ODFW trapped and killed the animal soon after.

"The cougar euthanized because it was considered a public safety risk," ODFW spokeswoman Michelle Dennehy said. "That basically means they've killed livestock, pets or have been seen repeatedly in broad daylight. Cougars are normally afraid of people, and if they're not, that indicates something isn't right."

Then on Tuesday, a two-year-old male cougar was found in a room under construction at the Oregon Motor Motel in The Dalles.



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has euthanized two cougars in Oregon this week, one in Silverton and the other in The Dalles.

ODFW responded after a call from city police and found the animal trapped in the small room. They determined the cougar was a public safety risk and sedated it with a dart gun through a vent in the wall, then took it off-site and killed it.

Cougars are becoming a more common sight in towns such as Silverton, which are close to a forested area and food, Dennehy said, and have long been part of life on the outskirts of The Dalles in

state's most populous coun-

ties, Multnomah, Marion, and

Lane - including the cities

of Portland, Eugene, and

Salem - should be eliminated

next month, when results are

expected back from a private

lab, said Multnomah County

Deputy District Attorney Tara

the late winter.

"But a cougar coming this far into downtown, into the business district and deep into a hotel complex, and not showing fear of people or wariness of urban environments? That's just extremely odd," said Jeremy Thompson, ODFW district wildlife biologist, in a press release. "This may have been a cougar that was unable to establish its own home range in its natural habitat."

The Dalles cougar was

the sixth euthanized by the state agency in 2018 because of public safety concerns, according to a press release.

Oregon's cougar population has rebounded from a low of around 200 animals in the late 1960s to more than 6,000 today, The Statesman Journal reported.

Encounters between people and cougars are rare. There has never been a confirmed attack by a wild cougar on a person in Oregon, Dennehy said.

"Seeing more cougars is part of a larger trend, especially in northwest Oregon, but people don't need to be alarmed," Dennehy said. "Just consider keeping pets indoors at night. If you do encounter a cougar, make yourself look big and don't run away from it.

Cougars were hunted to almost extinction in Oregon until 1957, when they were reclassified as a game animal. Hunting cougars is still allowed, but it's more restricted and there's a closely monitored bag limit.

In 1994, Oregon voters outlawed hunting cougars with dogs.

Officials report steady progress on rape kit backlog

By TOM JAMES Associated Press

SALEM — A backlog of rape kits in Oregon is a year away from being eliminated following the passage of a state law mandating quicker testing, officials say.

The kits collect biological material following reported sex crimes. In 2015, the Oregon State Police said it had a backlog of more than 5,600. In 2016, legislators passed a measure to speed up processing, but by 2017 state labs said their backlog had actually increased as old kits poured in from around the state.

The state patrol and Multnomah County now say that kits are being processed quickly, and that labs are within a year of completing testing on thousands of older, warehoused kits dating to 1983. Less than 2,000 are estimated to be left statewide. The backlog in three of the

Gardner. "We're waiting for approximately 150 kits," she said.

The statewide backlog is

also dropping, with state labs logging 1,172 waiting kits in February, the first decline in their backlog since 2015. Lab head Capt. Alex Gardner said that with new staff he expects to process the last by the end of the year.

Some kits are also held by local police, but the exact number is always changing as departments send their kits to the state for testing, Gardner said. A tally late last year and including approximately 157 of the state's more than 170 local departments, showed about 1,100 kits waiting to be

ADVERTISING

forwarded to Gardner's lab. But the tally of local

departments included some that had been processed before the count was finished. Because of that overlap, Gardner wrote in an email, he estimates the total statewide backlog is less. Statewide, he estimates less than 2,000 kits

Despite progress on the backlog, advocates say some victims still face barriers to having their reports taken seriously. In February the Portland Police Bureau announced it had used a SAFE kit to solve a 2006 crime, but a report later surfaced that the victim had given police the name of the suspect immediately following the attack.

The case mirrored a 2017 report that the agency had left a kit untested and made no arrest in a 2011 assault, despite also having the suspect's name and address.

The 2016 law that spurred testing of the kits, officially called Melissa's required police to pass kits to state authorities within 14 days. The law was named for Melissa Bittler, a 14 year-old Portland girl killed by a rapist on her way to school in 2001. In that case, DNA evidence linking the murder and other rapes went untested for five

Since the passage of the law, Jacqueline Swanson, a Portland attorney who has represented rape victims, said she has had calls from women asking what to do about investigations that seem to have stalled, and reporting that police had told them they were waiting for rape kit

Some kits are also attached to crimes for which the statute of limitations has expired. While Oregon has no statute of limitations for first-degree sex crimes linked to newly-discovered DNA evidence, evidence of lesser crimes does have a time limit.

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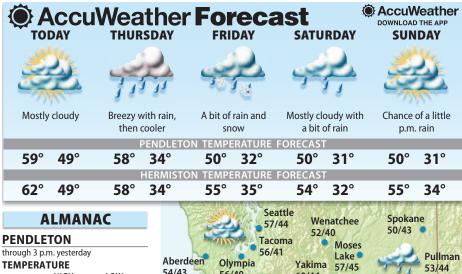
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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	58°	30°	
Normals	56°	36°	
Records	75° (1911)	18° (1913)
PRECIPIT/	ATION		
24 hours en		0.00"	
Month to d	ate		0.94"
Normal mo	nth to date		0.87"

Last year to date Normal year to date **HERMISTON**

Year to date

through 3 p.m. yesterday										
TEMPERATURE										
	HIGH	LOW								
Yesterday	61°	26°								
Normals	59°	35°								
Records	76° (1947)	19° (1943)								
PRECIPITATION										

24 hours ending 3 p.m. Month to date

Mar 24 Mar 31

Normal month to date	0.61"
Year to date	2.06"
Last year to date	4.19"
Normal year to date	2.85"
SUN AND MOON	
Sunrise today	6:57 a.m.
Sunset tonight	7:09 p.m.
Moonrise today	9:29 a.m.
Moonset today	none

unrise to	oday		6:57 a.m.			
unset to	night	7:09 p.m.				
/loonrise	today	9:29 a.m.				
/loonset	today		none			
First	Full	Last	New			
34	CA	6				

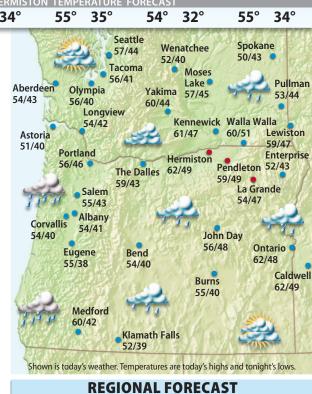
Apr 15

rain tonight.

0.00'

3.27" 5.10"

Apr 8



Coastal Oregon: Heavy rain today; a down-

pour in the morning, then rain in the south Eastern and Central Oregon: Mainly cloudy

today with a passing shower, except dry Western Washington: Cloudy today; periods of rain across the south. Occasional Rain and drizzle in the north; a shower near the Idaho border and in the mountains. Cascades: Periods of rain today. Plenty of clouds tonight with a couple of showers

Eastern Washington: Mostly cloudy today.

Northern California: Cloudy today: rain some heavy; however, snow showers in the interior mountains.

REGIO	NC	AL	CI	TIES	5	
	7	Thu.				
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	٧
storia	51	40	r	49	36	r
aker City	54	45	C	55	29	r
end	54	40	C	46	28	r
rookings	54	39		47	39	C
urns	55	40	sh	52	25	r
nterprise	52	43	C	54	28	r
ugene	55	38	r	47	34	r
leppner	57	48	C	53	32	r
lermiston	62	49	C	58	34	r
ohn Day	56	48	C	55	32	r
lamath Falls	52	39	sh	42	28	S
a Grande	54	47	C	55	31	r
/leacham	53	44	C	52	28	r
/ledford	60	42	r	50	36	r
lewport	52	40	r	47	38	r
lorth Bend	55	41	r	48	39	r
)ntario	62	48	C	60	35	r
asco	61	45	C	60	33	r
endleton	59	49	C	58	34	r
ortland	56	46	r	48	38	r
ledmond	58	40	C	50	26	r
alem	55	43	r	48	37	r
pokane	50	43	C	53	31	r

WORLD CITIES

55

Ukiah

Yakima

Vancouver

Walla Walla

44 c 43 r

51 c

57 36 r 56 28 r

	Т	oda	y	Thu.				
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W		
Beijing	56	33	S	64	39	S		
Hong Kong	74	59	S	73	65	S		
lerusalem	74	52	S	80	61	S		
_ondon	49	39	C	52	41	C		
Mexico City	78	53	рс	77	48	рс		
Moscow	34	21	sf	32	23	C		
Paris	45	34	рс	47	37	C		
Rome	56	41	sh	54	36	C		
Seoul	43	34	C	51	34	рс		
Sydney	70	67	r	73	69	sh		
Гокуо	46	45	r	61	47	sh		

WINDS (in mph) Today

Thursday Boardman W 10-20 SW 6-12 Pendleton **UV INDEX TODAY**

2 3 1 1 1 1 8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m. **0-2**, Low

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3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ num-Forecasts and graphics provided by

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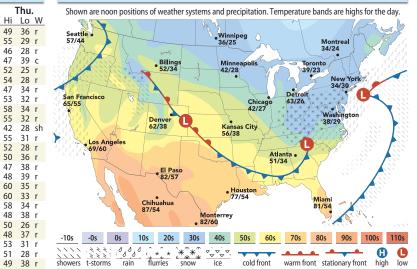
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National Summary: As snow winds down over the Ohio Valley and central Appalachians, snow will ramp up in the coastal Northeast today. Heavy rain, flooding and mudslides are in store for portions of California and Oregon.

Low -15° in Saranac Lake, N.Y.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 90° in Pompano Beach, Fla.

NATIONAL CITIES												
	Today Thur.							oday	y Thur.			
	Hi	Lo W	Hi	Lo	W		Hi	Lo	W	Hi_	Lo	W
Albuquerque	70	46 pc	77	52	C	Louisville	42	25	sn :	50	34	S
Atlanta	51	34 pc	59	39	S	Memphis	57	36	рс (53	49	рс
Atlantic City	38	28 r	44	31	рс	Miami	81	54		74	54	
Baltimore	36	28 sn	44	26	рс	Milwaukee	38	26	pc 4	44	29	S
Billings	52	34 s	54	42	C	Minneapolis	42	28	-	47	29	
Birmingham	57	32 s	61		S	Nashville	50	32		58	40	-
Boise	60	50 c	59	37	sh	New Orleans	70	51	s (59	52	S
Boston	36	32 sn	41	30	C	New York City	34	30 :		43	32	
Charleston, SC	60	39 c	63		рс	Oklahoma City	67	45		74	55	рс
Charleston, WV	39	26 sn	46		рс		53	38		52		рс
Chicago	42	27 pc	48	32	S	Philadelphia	33			43		рс
Cleveland	37	27 sn	40		рс	Phoenix	84			91	67	-
Dallas	75	53 pc	80	61	рс	Portland, ME	38			39	25	C
Denver	62	38 pc	72	46	рс	Providence	35	32		42		C
Detroit	43	26 pc	46	25	S	Raleigh	47	32		56		рс
El Paso	82	57 pc	86		C	Rapid City	51	24		49	35	C
Fairbanks	22	-1 pc	25	-	S	Reno	61	46		53	٠.	r
Fargo	39	27 c	42	27	-	Sacramento	65	57 1		53		sh
Honolulu	81	72 c	81	72	C	St. Louis	50	33		53	41	рс
Houston	77	54 s	80	62	рс	Salt Lake City	64	52	c (55	46	sh
Indianapolis	42	23 pc	47	29	S	San Diego	74	60	pc (58	58	r
Jacksonville	67	40 pc	66	39	S	San Francisco	65	55	r !	58	46	sh
Kansas City	56	38 pc	67	45	S	Seattle	57	44	C 4	48	37	r
Las Vegas	73	61 c	71		sh	Tucson	83			91		C
Little Rock	64	37 pc	70	48	рс	Washington, DC	38	29		45		рс
l A l	CO	CO -	(2	гг		\A/: -l-:+-	C 1	42		72	40	

64 43 pc 63 55 r Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice.

Wichita

69 60 r