

Employers weighing benefits of PERS liability payments

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
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 Bovett, 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

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 of 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.

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 was 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

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

state's most populous counties, 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 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

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 remain.

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 Law, 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 years.

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 results.

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.

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.

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AccuWeather Forecast

TODAY

Mostly cloudy

THURSDAY

Breezy with rain, then cooler

FRIDAY

A bit of rain and snow

SATURDAY

Mostly cloudy with a bit of rain

SUNDAY

Chance of a little p.m. rain

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
Today	Thu.	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
59° 49°	58° 34°	50° 32°	50° 31°	50° 31°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
62° 49°	58° 34°	55° 35°	54° 32°	55° 34°

ALMANAC

PENDLETON
through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	58°	30°
Normals	56°	36°
Records	75° (1911)	18° (1913)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.94"
Normal month to date 0.87"
Year to date 3.27"
Last year to date 5.10"
Normal year to date 3.38"

HERMISTON
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. 0.00"
Month to date 0.43"
Normal month to date 0.27"
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

	First	Full	Last	New
	Mar 24	Mar 31	Apr 8	Apr 15

AccuWeather
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Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

REGIONAL FORECAST

Coastal Oregon: Heavy rain today; a down-pour in the morning, then rain in the south.

Eastern Washington: Mostly cloudy today. 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.

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

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Thu.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	51	40	r	49	36	r
Baker City	54	45	c	55	29	r
Bend	54	40	c	46	28	r
Brookings	54	39	r	47	39	c
Burns	55	40	sh	52	25	r
Enterprise	52	43	c	54	28	r
Eugene	55	38	r	47	34	r
Heppner	57	48	c	53	32	r
Hermiston	62	49	c	58	34	r
John Day	56	48	c	55	32	r
Klamath Falls	52	39	sh	42	28	sh
La Grande	54	47	c	55	31	r
Meacham	53	44	c	52	28	r
Medford	60	42	r	50	36	r
Newport	52	40	r	47	38	r
North Bend	55	41	r	48	39	r
Ontario	62	48	c	60	35	r
Pasco	61	45	c	60	33	r
Pendleton	59	49	c	58	34	r
Portland	56	46	r	48	38	r
Redmond	58	40	c	50	26	r
Salem	55	43	r	48	37	r
Spokane	50	43	c	53	31	r
Ukiah	53	44	c	51	28	r
Vancouver	55	43	r	49	38	r
Walla Walla	60	51	c	57	36	r
Yakima	60	44	c	56	28	r

WORLD CITIES

	Today			Thu.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	56	33	s	64	39	s
Hong Kong	74	59	s	73	65	s
Jerusalem	74	52	s	80	61	s
London	49	39	c	52	41	c
Mexico City	78	53	pc	77	48	pc
Moscow	34	21	sf	32	23	c
Paris	45	34	pc	47	37	c
Rome	56	41	sh	54	36	c
Seoul	43	34	c	51	34	pc
Sydney	70	67	r	73	69	sh
Tokyo	46	45	r	61	47	sh

WINDS

	Today	Thursday
(in mph)	NE 4-8	W 10-20
Boardman	NE 4-8	W 10-20
Pendleton	SW 6-12	SW 10-20

UV INDEX TODAY

0 2 3 1 1 1

8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.

0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme

The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

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.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 90° in Pompano Beach, Fla. Low -15° in Saranac Lake, N.Y.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Thur.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	70	46	pc	77	52	c
Atlanta	51	34	pc	59	39	s
Atlanta City	38	28	r	44	31	pc
Baltimore	36	28	sn	44	26	pc
Billings	52	34	s	54	42	c
Birmingham	57	32	s	61	41	s
Boise	60	50	c	59	37	sh
Boston	36	32	sn	41	30	c
Charleston, SC	60	39	c	63	39	pc
Charleston, WV	39	26	sn	46	27	pc
Chicago	42	27	pc	48	32	s
Cleveland	37	27	sn	40	23	pc
Dallas	75	53	pc	80	61	pc
Denver	62	38	pc	72	46	c
Detroit	43	26	pc	46	25	s
El Paso	82	57	pc	86	60	c
Fairbanks	22	-1	pc	25	6	s
Fargo	39	27	c	42	27	s
Honolulu	81	72	c	81	72	c
Houston	77	54	s	80	62	pc
Indianapolis	42	23	pc	47	29	s
Jacksonville	67	40	pc	66	39	s
Kansas City						