

National study finds Oregon big spender on teacher benefits

By ROB MANNING
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Benefits for current and retired teachers get a bigger share of education spending in Oregon than they do almost anywhere else, according to a new analysis by Bellwether Education, a national think tank.

The Bellwether study found Oregon's spending on health insurance and pensions for teachers has risen much more quickly than the national average. In 2005, employee benefits accounted for 19.2 percent of education spending in Oregon. But by 2014, the costs of benefits such as health insurance and teacher pensions were consuming 26.3 percent of spending on schools.

In 2014, only Alaska spent a higher percentage than Oregon on teacher benefits, at 30.3 percent. States as a whole have seen costs eat up an increasing share of school spending — but it's happening at a faster pace in Oregon than in other states, the study found. In 2005, the national average for benefit spending was 16.2 percent, rising to 19.5 percent in 2014.

The Oregon School

Boards Association drew attention to the study earlier this week, by emailing out a link to an Education Week article on it.

OSBA executive director Jim Green said the study can help explain the effect of rising costs, including the Public Employee Retirement System, to voters and lawmakers.

"It at least allows us to say 'part of that funding that you gave us is going to pay for a benefit that isn't tied to anybody currently working for the school district,'" Green said. "I think it's a beneficial analysis for that."

But the statewide teachers union, the Oregon Education Association, found the study problematic.

OEA president John Larson said the study hasn't been peer-reviewed and represents a viewpoint that doesn't support public schools.

"Corporate interests and wealthy individuals continue to attack educators and other hard-working public servants by providing inaccurate or incomplete information about their benefits," Larson said in a statement to OPB. "The Bellwether report is no different."

Larson instead pointed to research from AARP showing a wage gap between teachers and professional jobs in the private sector.

"We should be focused on funding our schools properly, not on trying to continually chip away at the salary and benefits of educators, many of whom are barely paying the bills as it is," Larson said.

Authors of the Bellwether study acknowledge that part of the math that makes Oregon spending on teacher benefits appear so high is related to Oregon's relative low spending on teacher pay and other instructional costs.

The study used inflation-adjusted federal numbers from the National Center for Education Statistics to show that many Oregon school districts saw declines in funding as spending on teacher benefits went up.

But at least one large Oregon district questioned the figures, saying they didn't match budget numbers at the district. The Bellwether spreadsheet calculated Beaverton had a 33.6 percent drop in "total K-12 spending" from 2005 to 2014. But Beaverton officials had different figures.



In this May 24, 2018, file photo, a marijuana plant is shown in Springfield, Ore. A sheriff in southwest Oregon is asking for money from the state to investigate illegal marijuana operations, saying his department lacks the resources to do so.

Josephine County seeks state help to curb illegal marijuana operations

GRANTS PASS (AP) — A county sheriff in southwest Oregon is asking for money from the state to investigate illegal marijuana operations, saying his department lacks the resources to do so.

Josephine County Sheriff Dave Daniel says he needs \$648,000 to help fund a team of detectives, *The Daily Courier* newspaper of Grants Pass reports.

The county would pitch in \$350,000 to help form the team, the newspaper reported.

A bill passed by the Legislature this year assists cities and counties with costs incurred by law enforcement agencies in addressing unlawful marijuana cultivation or distribution operations.

Recreational and medical marijuana production and sales are legal in Oregon, subject to licensing and regulation. Overproduction of legal marijuana has caused prices to plummet, creating a greater incentive for illegal marijuana operations to proliferate, and for smuggling of product to other states for bigger profits.

"Josephine County has been unable to investigate or prosecute illegal marijuana operations due to lack of resources," the sheriff told the state's Criminal Justice Commission in a 12-page grant application submitted last week.

Daniel says illegal marijuana operations can hide as legal ones, and can go undetected without a task force dedicated to finding them.

Last month, authorities seized 82 marijuana plants, \$85,000 in cash and several guns from an unlicensed grow site near the town of Merlin, the newspaper reported.

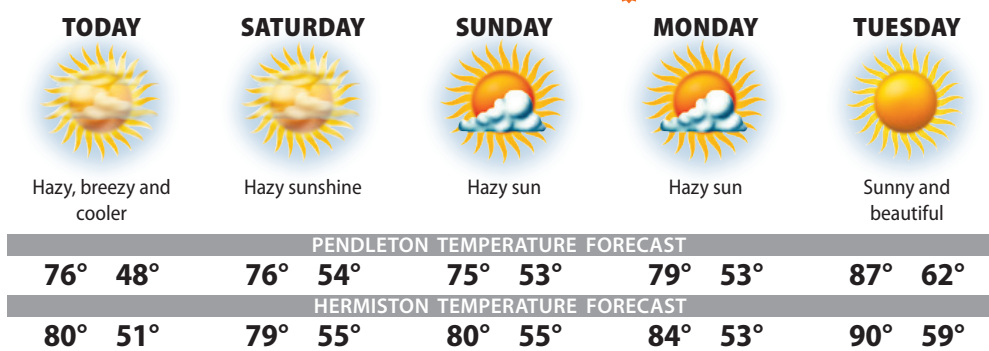
Daniel said his department has handled hundreds of marijuana-related calls in the past two years, including 423 last year and 223 calls so far this year.

County officials have identified nearly 300 marijuana grow properties with code violations, including illegal camping, sewage dumping, erosion problems, electrical issues and unpermitted structures, Daniel said.

The federal Drug Enforcement Administration has agreed to assign an agent to work with the proposed team, Daniel said.

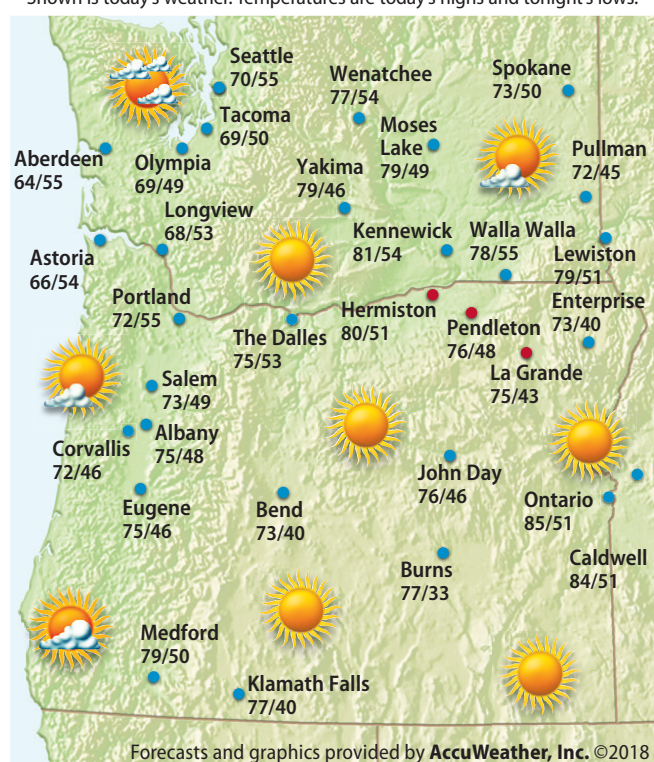
U.S. Attorney Billy Williams, who oversees federal prosecutions in Oregon, said earlier this year that the state has "significant overproduction" and that he would prioritize enforcement of overproduction, interstate trafficking, organized crime and cases involving underage marijuana use and environmental damage by illicit pot farms.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	88°	62°
Normals	86°	56°
Records	109° (1894)	34° (1910)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	Trace
Normal month to date	0.31"
Year to date	6.49"
Last year to date	11.37"
Normal year to date	8.26"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	88°	64°
Normals	86°	56°
Records	103° (1956)	41° (1938)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.03"
Normal month to date	0.15"
Year to date	5.13"
Last year to date	6.65"
Normal year to date	6.07"

WINDS (in mph)

Boardman	WSW 8-16	WSW 6-12
Pendleton	WSW 10-20	W 6-12

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	6:06 a.m.
Sunset tonight	7:48 p.m.
Moonrise today	7:11 p.m.
Moonset today	4:10 a.m.

Full Last New First

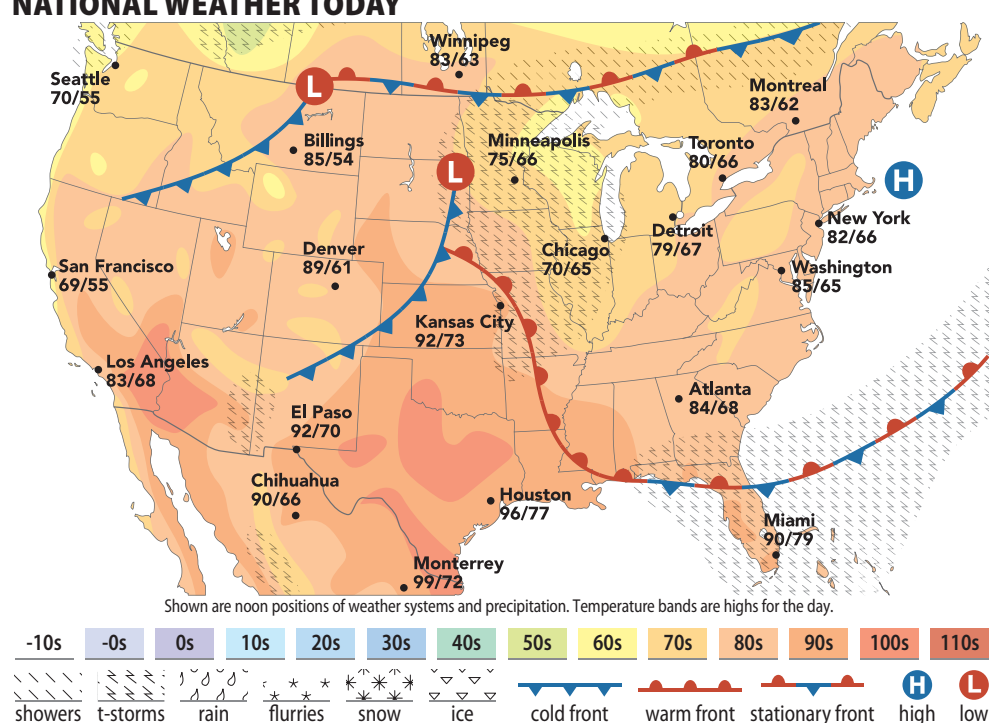


NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 108° in Needles, Calif. Low 27° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



BRIEFLY

Ex-youth pastor sentenced to 15 years on sex abuse charge

MEDFORD (AP) — A former Medford youth pastor who was punched in the face midway through a court hearing has been sentenced to more than 15 years in prison on a sex abuse charge.

The *Mail Tribune* reports U.S. District Court Judge Anne Aiken ruled Thursday that Donald Courtney Biggs be considered a "repeat and dangerous sex offender" for secretly recording dozens of young women and juvenile girls undressing in bathrooms at multiple church events between at least March 2013 through September of 2014.

Biggs was punched Wednesday at U.S. District Court in Medford after admitting earlier this year to taking a 14-year-old girl on a church trip to Southern California with the intent to film her exiting the shower. The assailant, who was not identified, was arrested on multiple charges, including fourth-degree assault and disorderly conduct.

Biggs pleaded guilty in February to one felony count of transporting with intent to engage in criminal sexual activity. As part of a plea deal, nine other transportation and child pornography charges were dropped.

Hood to Coast watching air quality as race nears

SEASIDE (AP) — Organizers of the annual Hood to Coast relay race are anxiously watching the air quality as the weekend race approaches.

Dan Floyd, the race's chief operating officers, told *The Daily Astorian* on Thursday that this is the first time he's ever had to consider smoky conditions during the relay race.

He says conditions appear to be easing and the air should be much clearer by the weekend, but organizers are reminding runners they participate at their own risk.

Wildfires around the region have made Pacific Northwest skies unusually smoky. More than 19,000 people will join the

race from Mount Hood to Seaside on Friday and Saturday.

Mandatory evacuations over Eastern Washington wildfire

TWISP, Wash. (AP) — Mandatory evacuations have been ordered for a lightly populated area of eastern Washington state as a wildfire continued to spread.

The Okanogan County Emergency Management agency on Thursday said those living near the fire on Crescent Mountain should immediately evacuate toward the town of Twisp. The agency said the evacuation order covered about 180 seasonal and full-time homes.

The fire was started July 29 by lightning and has grown to about 58 square miles.

It was burning Thursday about nine miles west of Twisp in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

There are 342 firefighters on the blaze, which is 34 percent contained.

Yakima settles with utility over fire started by police

YAKIMA, Wash. (AP) — A city in eastern Washington state has agreed to a settlement with a power company after a large fire started last year during a gun-shooting training exercise for local police officers.

The *Yakima Herald-Republic* reports the Yakima City Council on Tuesday approved a nearly \$120,000 settlement with Pacific Power Corp.

The city, which is not admitting fault, will pay half, and its insurance will cover the other half.

The fire burned nearly 5 square miles between June 27 and June 30.

An investigation by the state Department of Natural Resources concluded that two officers who were target shooting caused the fire.

One of the bullets from a live fire exercise severed a power line owned by Pacific Power Corp., causing it to fall to the ground and start the fire.

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