

Democrats: Unions feel betrayed and consider putting money elsewhere

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package including \$1 billion per year in new business taxes.

Democrats only passed it with the deciding vote of Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, who said if PERS reform didn't follow, she would lead an effort to refer the education tax package to the ballot, where she would work to sink it.

The education package is one of the crown jewels for Democrats, including Gov. Kate Brown. With its passage, it was clear to Democrats PERS reform was a must.

Several lawmakers told the Capital Bureau the PERS deficit was just too big to ignore. In his vote explanation, Rep. Marty Wilde, D-Eugene, said not cutting into benefits would lead to public employees being laid off in the coming years. It's a tough choice, but a necessary one, he wrote.

Voting explanations are voluntary statements lawmakers submit to the Legislature for the public record, and are sometimes used on controversial votes, though 17 explanations stands out.

"The bill includes system-wide cost savings that will protect critical services and ensure long-term stability in our retirement system," wrote Rep. Teresa Alonso Leon, D-Woodburn, in her



OPB photo

In a political environment where public employee unions give generously to many Democrats' campaigns, unions into pensions is a line rarely crossed.

vote explanation. "I believe it will help head off corporate efforts to make even deeper cuts to employee benefits."

Republicans have been clamoring for PERS reform, but said Courtney and Kotek's plan didn't go far enough. Plus, they have no interest in making anything easier for Democrats, who have dominated the session with their supermajority in both chambers.

SB 1049 nearly died until Kotek got two Democrats to change their votes at the last minute.

Kotek called a recess, and Rep. Andrea Salinas, D-Lake Oswego, joined longtime Portland Rep. Mitch Greenlick in changing her vote at Kotek's request.

In 2018, public employee unions spent \$4.8 million

on candidates seeking legislative seats, according to the Institute on Money in Politics. Trade unions chipped in another \$2.4 million.

Immediately, and as expected, the unions voiced their fury about the pension vote.

Rumors started circulating that unions could fund candidates to challenge some politically weaker Democrats who supported the bill. Stronger politicians might see their ambitions of statewide office evaporate.

"We're taking it really, really serious," said Joe Baessler, the political director for Oregon's chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. "It was a big blow."

Waiting game: Huawei blacklist could put a damper on rural broadband

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only stop installing new Huawei equipment, but also rip out and replace what they already have in their systems.

"There are lots of ambiguous mandates out there," Franell said.

It started in April 2018, when the Federal Communications Commission posted a notice of proposed rule-making, signaling the government was considering a restriction of certain types of gear from Huawei based on worries that the Chinese company could pose a national security threat. Later Congress included language in the 2019 National Defense Authorization excluding technology from Huawei and ZTE, another Chinese tech company, from all government systems.

Last week President Donald Trump issued an executive order banning purchase of communications equipment from companies considered by the administration to pose a national security threat, and the Department of Commerce placed Huawei on a trade blacklist. In a White House speech Trump called Huawei "very dangerous" but also said that he could see the tech company included in a trade deal.

Franell said many Huawei products are 40% cheaper than he can get anywhere else, and they sometimes makes products he can't buy from a U.S.-based company. He showed off a cable modem termination system that he pushed Huawei to start exporting to the United States after seeing one during a tour of a facility in China.

"Cisco makes cable modem termination systems, but they don't make them like this," he said. "These are remarkably scaleable. [Huawei] brought this equipment to the United States on my request, and now I don't know if I'll get to keep it."

In addition, he said, Huawei equipment is the most reliable in his network. In the past five years he has only had one equipment failure from a Huawei piece — a level of reliability he said he has not been able to find elsewhere.

There are concerns

within the government, however, that infusing crucial rural networks with technology from China could open up those networks to spying and sabotage via "back doors" installed in the hardware. "The U.S. Government has determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that Huawei has been involved in activities contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States," the Department of Commerce report read.

Franell acknowledged spying is a possibility — the United States was caught installing its own back doors in exported technology in the past, and it stands to reason other countries would employ similar techniques. He said if there were ever any evidence that were happening with Huawei, he would move to purge the risk from his network without waiting for the government to give the direction.

If the government forces rural internet providers to replace all the Huawei equipment in their systems, Franell said it wouldn't put EOT out of business.

"For us, it would be a distraction," he said. "But for some other companies it could be catastrophic."

Replacing \$500,000 worth of Huawei equipment would likely cost about \$1.2 million for a company to purchase more expensive parts from other companies, reengineer their system and expend the labor for the installations, he estimated.

Even if the government reimburses them afterward, he said, "If you're into it for \$20 million, where do you get the money?"

It could easily put some rural providers out of business.

Importance of rural internet

Eastern Oregon's most rural cities know the struggle it can be to get the internet service so important to modern life, and the last thing they want to do is go backward in that effort.

Debbie Sutor, mayor of Adams, said she is excited that Eastern Oregon Telecom will be extending fiber internet to every home and business in Adams, Weston

and Athena this year. Internet access opens up opportunities for the town's 350 residents to see a doctor from another city over video chat, telecommute to a higher-paying job, shop online for items not found in town or get a college degree without leaving home.

"Adams is a very small rural town, and this will expand our borders," she said.

The town currently has only a single internet provider with what she described as very slow and unreliable wireless internet.

"Any time we have weather conditions it will go out," she said.

Jennifer Spurgeon, mayor of Weston, also described struggles in her town of almost 650 residents, some of whom can't even access the unreliable wireless internet due to geographical constraints.

"It's hard to quantify the time lost to the slow-speed internet," she said, noting that her husband, a real estate appraiser, spends many hours of his job waiting on documents to upload or download.

Athena mayor Rebecca Schroeder echoed those thoughts.

"It's a real positive," she said of faster internet. "People can work in a small town, live in a small town and be part of the fabric of the community and yet take their business to the next level."

Farmers also benefit from rural internet access, as the technology allows them to tap into precision irrigation, self-driving tractors, long-distance monitoring of field conditions and other cutting-edge agricultural technology to boost productivity and efficiency.

Franell said that EOT is starting out with fiber-to-home connections in Eastern Umatilla County, but in the future the company will likely extend wireless internet outside city limits for agricultural use as well.

He said he plans to complete a survey of residents of Athena, Weston and Adams to gauge their internet literacy, then provide some classes on how they can better use their new, faster internet connection.

Pride: State Police rolls with it

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children all the way up to adulthood. We know this harassment and hate crime victimization often goes under-reported by LGBTQ community members, as we often hear there is a distrust of law enforcement — because they feel we harbor bias against these citizens and won't take their cases seriously."

Oregon State Police with this car for this month, Fox said, hopes to "engage the LGBTQ community on a new level to show we are here for you and we are a resource for you. We will be attending events they organize, to show the agency is committed to inclusion and prevention of bias/hate crime."

Alice Hepburn said state police sending that message is significant for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community. She is president of Pendleton chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

"Most nations the police is so iconic," she said, "and if the police have your back, that's something special."

She also said the rainbow display signals someone is an ally to LGBTQ folks, and that is not the case in all places. Police have too often been tools for harassing the community.

New York police almost 50 years ago raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in lower Manhattan. The raid set off a series of riots at the end of June 1969 in protest. June is Pride Month to commemorate those events. James O'Neill, police commissioner for New York City, apologized Thursday for the raid, a first for a department official.

The rainbow decals on a state police car, however, raised a red flag for Hermiston police Chief Jason Edmiston.

"We are not elected officials," he said. "The last thing we should be doing is engaging in political issues."

The Hermiston Police Department will continue to be neutral partners with com-



Photo contributed by Oregon State Police
Oregon State Police rolled out a 2019 Dodge Charger with rainbow graphics for Pride Month.

munity groups, Edmiston stressed, but social causes have become divisive, and police have enough to handle without jumping into certain circles. While the state police may receive some short-term political benefit from the car, he said, the long-term fallout could be problematic because this sets up a slippery slope.

Could the National Rifle Association, for example, sponsor a police car, Edmiston pondered, or would OSP have cars that recognize an atheist event?

"You can't be a little bit in with political matters," Edmiston said. "You're either in or you're out."

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan didn't want to weigh in on the matter, and Pendleton police Chief Stuart Roberts didn't return a call seeking comment.

Fox said aside from negative comments on social media, state police has received "overwhelmingly positive" responses on the car. The law enforcement agency also issued this message about the car on social media:

"At the Oregon State Police, we want to ensure our citizens know we value all Oregonians and their safety. OSP's workforce includes LGBTQ employees and they want to know that they are here and working hard to support the agency's mission."

This is your Oregon State Police — achieving our agency mission of serving Oregon with a diverse workforce ded-

icated to the protection of people, property and natural resources."

Fox also explained state police does not use a one-size-fits-all approach when engaging with the public but considers whether the opportunities fit with the agency's values. OSP printed an American flag and MIA/POW themed decals for veterans events, he said, and tries to connect with residents "at all levels and places, including parades, houses of worship, in schools, fairs or random gatherings that present opportunities for positive interactions."

While car wraps and special event decals are fairly common recruiting tools, Fox said this is a new engagement tool for Oregon State Police to gauge public response at patriotic and Pride events and see if there is an increase in applications from the events. He also said this is cost effective method of outreach.

"These are just stickers," he said, "not permanent, and the minimal cost is a bargain for positive interaction with tens of thousands of citizens to show OSP is an inclusive employer and here to offer equal public safety protections for all our citizens."

The lone Oregon State Police Pride car is in Salem at the Capitol for visitors to see. After the Pride events this month, the car goes back to Salem for standard decals. Then it hits the road for the next 140,000 miles, the state police target to retire vehicles.

Wolves: Management plan approved

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its first Wolf Conservation and Management Plan in 2005, which is supposed to be revised every five years.

The last revision happened in 2010, when wildlife officials identified just 21 known wolves statewide. Today, the minimum known population is 137 wolves. The commission removed wolves east of highways 395, 78 and 95 from the state endangered species list in 2015, and the latest plan revision started a year later.

Gray wolves are still federally protected in the western two-thirds of Oregon, though that could change under a proposal by the Trump administration to delist wolves across the Lower 48 states.

Ranchers have long argued they need to be able to kill wolves that make a habit out of preying on livestock. But environmental groups say management practices should focus more on using non-lethal deterrents to prevent conflicts.

Last year, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife spent more than \$100,000 to hire a professional mediator, bringing the two sides together to try and find areas of compromise. However, the four environmental groups — Oregon Wild, Defenders of Wildlife, Cascadia Wildlands and the Center for Biological Diversity — pulled out of talks, describing the process as flawed and unscientific.

At the heart of the issue is the definition for what ODFW calls "chronic depredation." Under the revised plan, ranchers in Eastern Oregon can apply to kill wolves if they attack livestock two times within nine months. The 2010 plan allowed for killing wolves after two confirmed attacks over any period of time in Eastern Oregon.

The commission considered changing the proposed standard to three attacks in 12 months, though the motion was ultimately defeated.

Once a wolf or pack meets

the definition of chronic depredation, ODFW can issue what are known as "controlled take" permits that allow other members of the public to kill the predators within a limited scope. Wolf advocates staunchly oppose controlled take, fearing it will lead to general wolf hunting.

The commission did approve an amendment to controlled take regulations, stipulating permits can only be approved through a separate rule-making process. In a statement, ODFW says it has not approved controlled take of wolves and has no plans to at this time.

Derek Broman, ODFW carnivore and furbearer coordinator, said the plan is not dramatically different than before, though it does reflect the current situation in Oregon.

"We continue to maintain a conservation-based plan that is true to its origins, but provides additional clarity," Broman said. "Now we have a decade of our own information."

Ranchers from across the state traveled to Salem to provide their input on the plan. Jerome Rosa, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, said his members have "suffered enormous losses, both economic and emotional" due to wolves. He and others representing the industry argued for more collaring of wolves and management zones with population targets to assist producers.

Broman said collaring remains a valuable tool, but stopped short of making any promises. "The issue is, collaring wolves is a very exhausting, very challenging practice," he said.

In a staff presentation to the commission, Broman said the revised plan does not establish population targets or caps.

Broman said the plan will continue to emphasize non-lethal deterrents in every phase of management, and ODFW added a new chapter to monitor potential threats to the species — such as poaching, dis-

eases and habitat destruction.

Rusty Inglis, a rancher and president of the Harney County Farm Bureau, said the success of the wolf is coming at a high cost for the livestock industry and rural Oregon as a whole.

"Ranching is a mainstay economic driver in most rural communities here in Oregon," Inglis said. "Whenever a ranching family faces economic loss, the whole community loses."

Veril Nelson, a southwest Oregon rancher and wolf committee co-chairman for the Cattlemen's Association, said the losses don't just come from dead animals. He said studies have shown cows suffer stress, weight loss and poor grazing that can all affect a rancher's bottom line.

Still, ranchers by and large urged the commission to pass the plan as proposed. Environmental groups were more sharp in their opposition to the plan.

"We do not want dead livestock any more than the livestock industry does," said Sristi Kamal, Oregon senior representative for Defenders of Wildlife. "We need more from the state to be able to help producers to learn how to live with wolves."

Ellen Marmon, a resident of Eugene, agreed that more emphasis should be put on non-lethal deterrents and less on killing wolves.

"I think our wilderness should be truly wild," Marmon said. "(Wolves) are a precious resource, just like our farms and just like our forests."

Commissioner Holly Akenson said the rising wolf population shows that the state's management has been working so far, and the new plan will be a continuation of that success. She described now as a time to celebrate.

"I think the plan in the past has shown to be really successful," Akenson said. "We have a strong wolf population. It continues to rise. I hope everyone here can find some support for this plan."