

Problems with how state's universities spend money

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**

Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — As thousands of public university workers in Oregon prepare to strike at the end of the month, the union representing them claims there are fundamental problems with how the universities spend money.

A report released Tuesday by SEIU Local 503 is the latest volley ahead of a looming strike by nearly 5,000 classified workers at Oregon's seven public universities.

In "Misplaced Priorities," the report's author, Daniel Morris, contends that more dollars have been flowing toward high salaries for university presidents and top administrators, sports programs and construction financed by borrowing.

The report claims that the state's public universities have boosted spending in those areas at the expense of classified workers — those who clean, cook and otherwise make the state's seven universities function.

Those workers are preparing to walk off the job in the midst of an impasse over contract negotiations. The union argues that the proposed cost-of-living increases and pay bumps aren't enough.

And the union is now publicly questioning whether universities have their spending priorities straight.

For example, in recent years, they claim, univer-



EOU Photo

A report released Tuesday by SEIU Local 503 is the latest volley ahead of a looming strike by nearly 5,000 classified workers at Oregon's seven public universities, including Eastern Oregon University in La Grande.

sities have been borrowing more and more money to build new facilities.

In the 1999-2001 budget, 3% of state money given to universities went toward paying down debt, Morris wrote in the report. In the 2017-19 biennium, 16% of state funds allocated toward universities paid debt.

The cause, Morris argues: diminished legislative oversight.

In 2013, lawmakers disbanded the state board of higher education, allowing universities to set up their own independent governing boards.

"This arrangement came with less statewide scrutiny of governance decisions, and more authority for universities to borrow money for capital projects," Morris wrote.

Capital construction funds are kept separate from other types of funding the university receives, said Di Saunders, a spokeswoman for the universities.

There's a "strict" ranking system for crucial projects through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, and building projects stay separate from the operating budget, she said.

And universities received

relatively little capital construction funding in the 2019-21 biennial budget, Saunders said.

"I don't agree that there's been such a dramatic change in university budgeting since that change did occur," Saunders said. "There are more expenses that the universities are having to bear that they did not before."

For example, after the switch, each university needed its own legal help and had to hire internal auditors.

The union also condemns what it calls "administrative bloat," claiming that there are too many managers.

While Oregon state agencies on average have a management-to-worker ratio of 1 manager for every 10 workers, at public universities it's 1-to-5.

Saunders, the university spokeswoman, questioned the validity of comparing a university to a state agency. Managers at public universities, she said, have their own duties apart from supervising workers.

But lopsided compensation, with some workers drawing on public benefits, has provoked the ire of the union as well.

In 2018, the average public

university president in Oregon made about \$513,000, about 11 times what the average classified worker made, according to SEIU's report. About half of classified workers make less than \$40,000 a year.

Meanwhile, the university system has proposed in its contract requiring food service workers to pay \$3 for each meal at work instead of \$1.

That feels petty, said Melissa Unger, executive director of SEIU Local 503.

"I don't know how that is making sure that (the universities) meet their bottom line," Unger said. "That's a continued example of how this proposal just feels disrespectful and like they're nickel and diming their workers."

The universities say they pay their presidents and top administrators a market rate for high-profile jobs managing the education of thousands of students, and for recruiting major donors.

"Those people are running, in some cases, billion-dollar entities," Saunders said. "They're high-risk entities. You have 30,000 students that you have to educate, protect, make sure that they're safe, feed, clothe sometimes, make sure their housing is in good order, and so there is a lot of responsibility for those jobs at the top levels."

Settlement talks are ongoing, and the parties plan to meet again next week.

Bahamians begin rescues as Dorian moves on toward U.S.

By **RAMON ESPINOSA, DÁNICA COTO AND MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN**
Associated Press

FREEPORT, Bahamas — Bahamians rescued victims of Hurricane Dorian with jet skis and a bulldozer as the U.S. Coast Guard, Britain's Royal Navy and a handful of aid groups tried to get food and medicine to survivors and take the most desperate people to safety.

Airports were flooded and roads impassable after the most powerful storm to hit the Bahamas in recorded history parked over Abaco and Grand Bahama islands, pounding them with winds up to 185 mph and torrential rain before finally moving into open waters Tuesday on a course toward Florida.

People on the U.S. coast made final preparations for a storm with winds at a still-dangerous 110 mph, making it a Category 2 storm.

At least seven deaths were reported in the Bahamas, with the full scope of the disaster still unknown.

The storm's punishing winds and muddy brown floodwaters destroyed or severely damaged thousands

of homes, crippled hospitals and trapped people in attics.

"It's total devastation. It's decimated. Apocalyptic," said Lia Head-Rigby, who helps run a local hurricane relief group and flew over the Bahamas' hard-hit Abaco Islands. "It's not rebuilding something that was there; we have to start again."

She said her representative on Abaco told her there were "a lot more dead," though she had no numbers as bodies were being gathered.

The Bahamas' prime minister also expected more deaths and predicted that rebuilding would require "a massive, coordinated effort."

"We are in the midst of one of the greatest national crises in our country's history," Prime Minister Hubert Minnis said at a news conference. "No effort or resources will be held back."

Five Coast Guard helicopters ran near-hourly flights to the stricken Abaco, flying more than 20 injured people to the capital's main hospital. British sailors were also rushing in aid. A few private aid groups also tried to reach the battered islands in the northern Bahamas.

"We don't want people thinking we've forgotten them. ... We know what



AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

Volunteers rescue several families that arrived on small boats, from the rising waters of Hurricane Dorian, near the Causarina bridge in Freeport, Grand Bahama, Bahamas, on Tuesday. The storm's punishing winds and muddy brown floodwaters devastated thousands of homes, crippled hospitals and trapped people in attics.

your conditions are," Tammy Mitchell of the Bahamas' National Emergency Management Agency told ZNS Bahamas radio station.

With their heads bowed against heavy wind and rain, rescuers began evacuating people from the storm's aftermath across Grand Bahama island late Tuesday, using jet skis, boats and even a huge bulldozer that cradled children and adults in its digger as it churned through deep waters and carried them to safety.

One rescuer gently scooped up an elderly man in his arms and walked toward a pickup truck waiting to evacuate him and others to higher ground.

Over 2 million people along the coast in Florida, Georgia and North and South Carolina were warned to evacuate. While the threat of a direct hit on Florida had all but evaporated, Dorian was expected to pass dangerously close to Georgia and South Carolina — and perhaps strike North Carolina — on

Thursday or Friday.

Even if landfall does not occur, the system is likely to cause storm surge and severe flooding, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said.

"Don't tough it out. Get out," said U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency official Carlos Castillo.

In the Bahamas, Red Cross spokesman Matthew Cochrane said more than 13,000 houses, or about 45% of the homes on Grand Bahama and Abaco, were believed to be severely damaged or destroyed. U.N. officials said more than 60,000 people on the hard-hit islands will need food, and the Red Cross said some 62,000 will need clean drinking water.

"What we are hearing lends credence to the fact that this has been a catastrophic storm and a catastrophic impact," Cochrane said.

Lawson Bates, a staffer for Arkansas-based Medicorps, flew over Abaco and said: "It looks completely flattened. There's boats way inland that are flipped over. It's total devastation."

The Red Cross authorized \$500,000 for the first wave of disaster relief, Cochrane said. U.N. humanitarian teams stood ready to go into the stricken areas to help

assess damage and the country's needs, U.N. spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said. The U.S. government also sent a disaster response team.

Abaco and Grand Bahama islands, with a combined population of about 70,000, are known for their marinas, golf courses and all-inclusive resorts. To the south, the Bahamas' most populous island, New Providence, which includes the capital city of Nassau and has over a quarter-million people, had little damage.

The U.S. Coast Guard airlifted at least 21 people injured on Abaco. Choppy, coffee-colored floodwaters reached roofs and the tops of palm trees.

"We will confirm what the real situation is on the ground," Health Minister Duane Sands said. "We are hoping and praying that the loss of life is limited."

Sands said Dorian rendered the main hospital on Grand Bahama unusable, while the hospital at Marsh Harbor on Abaco was in need of food, water, medicine and surgical supplies. He said crews were trying to fly out five to seven kidney failure patients from Abaco who had not received dialysis since Friday.

Winter: Colder and snowier than usual

Continued from Page A1

er's Almanac warns that Eastern Oregon and the rest of the Intermountain region should expect two big snowstorms as late as April next year.

Per NWS data, the most recorded snowfall in Pendleton during April was 2.2 inches in 1975.

Another snow- and rain-heavy winter would continue a streak for the city. From the start of December 2018 through March of this year, NWS data shows Pendleton received 36.3 inches of snow and 7.7 inches of rain. That data also shows the city's winter average as 13.7 inches and 5.29 inches, respectively.

If the Old Farmer's Almanac is right, it'd be a winter trend not expected to last.

The *Wallowa County Chieftain* reported last week that a University of Idaho study found that "consecutive low snow years may become six times more common across the Western United States over the latter



Staff photo by E.J. Harris, File

Motorists negotiate a snow-covered stretch of Southwest Isaac Avenue in February 2019 in Pendleton. For the 2019-20 winter, the Intermountain region, which includes Eastern Oregon, will reportedly be characterized by "low temps, deep powder."

half of this century."

The question is, will the Old Farmer's Almanac be right?

Founded in 1792 by Robert B. Thomas, the Old Farmer's Almanac provides information on weather forecasts,

planting cycles, astronomical data, recipes and more. Using a secret formula derived from weather patterns, astronomical cycles, and sun spots, the almanac has published long-term winter forecasts for over two centuries.

Though these long range predictions are made up to 18 months in advance, the publication has long boasted an accuracy rate of 80% or above.

George Perry, general forecaster at the NWS's Pendleton office, said he doesn't pay much attention to the almanac's predictions and can't say anything about its accuracy without knowing its method.

However, when it comes to the forecasts the NWS develops for weather 7-14 days in advance — the NWS's Climate Prediction Center produces forecasts as much as three months out — Perry said they use models to analyze and make predictions.

But still, forecasts one to two weeks ahead of time are "highly variable."

"You can get small changes in two days that may not do much at the time but could influence significant changes in 10 days," Perry said.

Plea: Shermantine no longer faces a murder charge for the 2018 killing

Continued from Page A1

torium on executions. Umatilla County has not had an aggravated murder case since 2015.

Jaelyn Jenkins, chief deputy district attorney, filed a notice on Aug. 3 the state will not seek the death penalty for Somerville. The filing does provide an explanation.

The next hearing in the case is Tuesday, and the court set Nov. 5 for a settlement conference.

Pending that outcome, the case has an all-day hearing June 9, 2020, to consider motions about a month before the trial. Defense attorney Benjamin Kim asked for that

hearing this past June when he notified the court he planned on filing a hefty demurrer or objection.

"I anticipate that the Demurrer filed will exceed 500 pages and will require significant time for the State to file a written response," according to the notice. "While I believe the arguments set forth in the Demurrer are well founded in law, and without conceding the legal arguments contained therein, the Demurrer also preserves a series of arguments and objections in order to litigate the issues on a possible appeal."