

# EOU, student services workers prepare for strike

By DICK MASON  
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — The specter of a strike by the classified staff at Oregon's seven public universities, including Eastern Oregon University, is looming larger.

The employees voted late Tuesday to authorize a strike if their union, SEIU 503, and the state's public universities can't reach an agreement on a new contract by next Monday, according to The Associated Press.

Classified staff are student services employees, such as custodians, carpenters, plumbers, office specialists, information technology specialists and heating, air conditioning and ventilation system specialists.

These employees of the state's seven public universities would officially start the strike Sept. 30, according to an announcement from SEIU 503, which represents 4,500 public university employees, among them about 130 who work at EOU.

Jo Hickerson, president of EOU's SEIU 503 chapter, was optimistic earlier this summer that a strike could be averted and remains so now.

"I'm still hopeful that a settlement can be reached before there is a strike," Hickerson said Wednesday.



EO Media Group Photo/Dick Mason

**As thousands of classified employees at Oregon's public universities, including La Grande's Eastern Oregon University, prepare to strike, college administrators are making contingency plans in case a strike happens at the same time classes start.**

She said university workers would prefer not to strike.

"It is not something we want to do. It is something we have to do (if an offer they feel is not fair is put on the table)," Hickerson said. "We feel we have no choice."

Hickerson said the biggest issue in the bargaining concerns cost-of-living wage increases. She said what the state is offering would be less than the expected inflation rate.

"Anything less than (a raise of) 3% is taking away the buying power of employees," Hickerson said.

A Sept. 23 bargaining session, set to take place at Portland State University, may be the last one prior to a strike, but Hickerson said the SEIU bargaining team is willing to participate in future bargaining sessions.

"We are not walking away from the table," she said. "We will meet on any date if there

is a conversation to be had."

Tim Seydel, Eastern's vice president for university advancement, said EOU officials are hoping for the best but also preparing for a strike. He said that should there be a strike, EOU will continue holding classes and providing all of the same services it does now for students, keeping its offices open and holding all scheduled on-campus events.

He said EOU wants the

best for its classified staff, whom he describes as "very valued employees."

According to an SEIU news release, 95% of the state's 4,500 student services workers at public universities voted to strike Sept. 30 if a settlement is not reached. Hickerson said that at EOU, where fall term classes begin Sept. 25, at least 90% of the university's student services employees voted for the strike date.

Should there be a strike, workers will be assisted by a union hardship fund that would provide employees with up to \$400 a week, said Jay Parasco, a spokesman for SEIU 503.

EOU President Tom Insko, in an email sent to all Eastern employees Wednesday afternoon, said he has a feeling of optimism.

"As we open the new academic year, and despite ongoing conversations around a possible strike, we continue to be optimistic an agreement that supports EOU employees and students can be reached. Our classified employees are an integral part of the university and their contributions toward our shared success are valued and appreciated," Insko said.

He noted that the state's universities have boosted their offer to student services

workers in recent bargaining sessions.

"This new proposal is intended to recognize the meaningful value our classified staff contribute to this institution," Insko said.

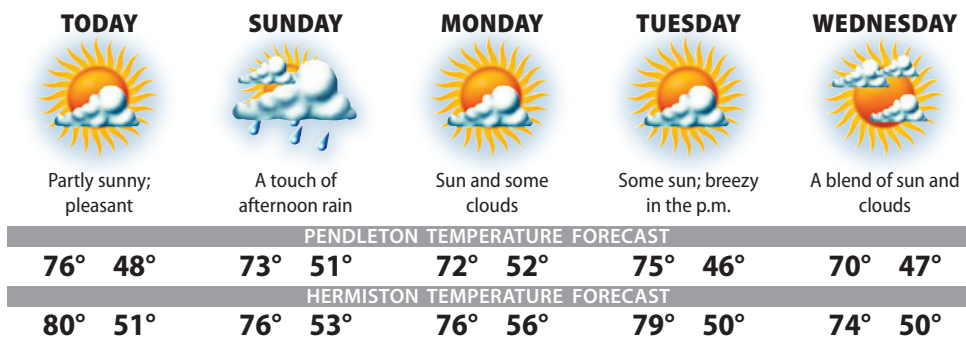
The public universities are offering cost-of-living increases that would total 4% over two years, plus incremental wage step increases that total 9.5% over two years, said Di Saunders, a spokesperson for the public universities.

She explained that increases are provided to classified employees each year for satisfactory or better job performance. More than 70% of the university's classified staff qualify for annual step increases. These are employees who are not at the top of their wage scale, which takes 10 years to reach.

Saunders said those who have "topped out" and no longer qualify for step increases have been offered a one-time \$750 bonus by the state under proposed terms of the contract.

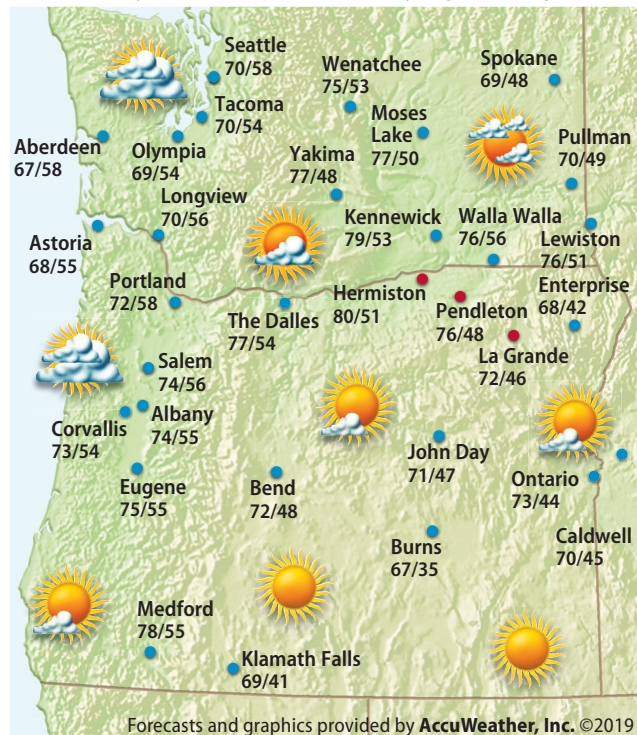
According to the SEIU news release, the union is seeking a 6.25% cost-of-living increase spread over two years and a modified wage scale. The union is asking for the lowest step of the wage scale to be removed and a new top step added.

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

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



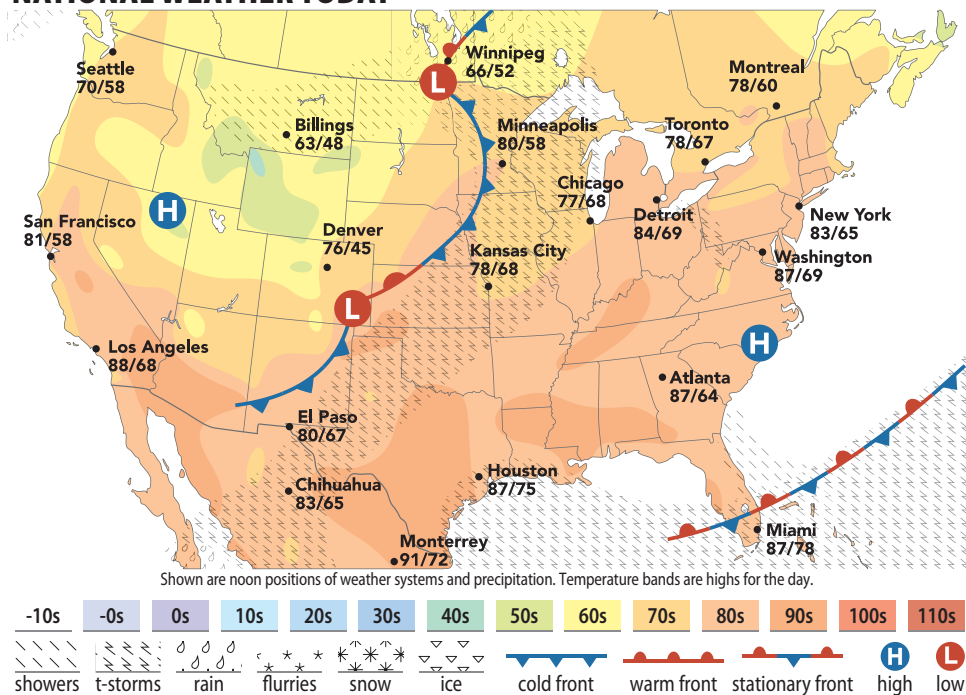
## ALMANAC

Table with weather statistics for Pendleton and Hermiston, including temperature, precipitation, and wind data.

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)  
High 102° in Cotulla, Texas Low 19° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



## BRIEFLY

### Man suspected of theft critically hurt outside Home Depot

PORTLAND — Police say a Home Depot customer and a man suspected of theft near a Northeast Portland store got into an altercation that left the suspect critically injured.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reported a security guard was on a bike trail confronting a suspect Thursday when a community member got into a confrontation with the suspect and "weapons were produced."

Police say the suspect's injuries are believed to be from gunshots. He was taken to a hospital in critical condition.

Police said the community member, a man, was cooperating with investigators. Around 3:15 p.m. he was still at the scene, and appeared to have minor injuries.

Police haven't said who fired a weapon. An investigation is ongoing.

### Family of woman killed dashing across road settles for \$305K

PORTLAND — The family of a

31-year-old woman who died after she tried to run across U.S. 26 at night has agreed to settle a wrongful death lawsuit in exchange for \$305,000 from the two drivers who struck her.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reports the family of Savannah Munden was scheduled to go to trial this week against the first driver, who was drunk when he hit Munden on an on-ramp near downtown Portland. Police say Brent McCune had a blood alcohol level of 0.22% over two hours after his car struck Munden Aug. 8, 2016.

The legal limit for driving is 0.08%. McCune was sentenced to 30 days in jail for driving under the influence of intoxicants and hit-and-run driving.

He wasn't prosecuted for causing Munden's death because prosecutors couldn't determine whether a sober driver would have been able to avoid hitting Munden. It also was unclear if McCune or the second driver caused her death.

The second driver, Salvador Santillan Gomez, stopped, stayed at the scene and wasn't charged with any crimes.

McCune and his insurance company agreed to pay \$255,000. Although Gomez wasn't listed as a defendant in the lawsuit, Gomez's insurer agreed to pay \$50,000.

— Associated Press

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