

Grant County deputy to head coronavirus task force

County’s emergency management coordinator resigns over decision

By STEVEN MITCHELL
EO Media Group

JOHN DAY — The Grant County Court, in an emergency planning meeting to address the new coronavirus on March 6, named Deputy Dave Dobler, county search and rescue coordinator, as incident commander of a new task force.

Although there are no known cases in Grant County, Dobler, along with his 30 search and rescue volunteers, will track people in the community who may have the virus using search and rescue software and will share the information with agencies, such as police, fire and emergency medical services.

“We owe it to our community to be proactive,” Dobler said.

Dobler said the task force would also focus on prevention. He said there is more the county could do, such as hiring a part-time employee to circulate through the community to sanitize frequently used surfaces, such as door handles, sur-



Grant County Undersheriff Zach Mobley, left, and Deputy Dave Dobler address the Grant County Court on Friday in an emergency meeting to plan for the coronavirus. While the court was careful not to create a panic with no known cases in Grant County, it still wants to “get ahead” of the virus.

faces and keypads in public places.

“You can say, ‘Well, those are the business’ problem,’” Dobler said. “Actually, those are all of our problems.”

Dobler said the area has limited police, fire and EMS.

“Our ability to respond is limited if we are sick, and

our community deserves better,” he said.

Dobler proposed the creation of an emergency operations center to be open during business hours. Dobler said he wants to set up phone lines, a website and an exclusive email address to track information about illnesses within the community.

ensure people are following “good hygiene.”

“We are a small community, and the nice thing about being small is that we can be agile and do things that bigger communities are not going to do because politically they are afraid to take those steps,” Dobler said. “I don’t think we are in a community that is afraid to take those steps.”

Dobler said he would like to have a plan in place should any emergency dispatchers get sick. Dobler said he does not know what that plan would look like, but would like to have it tested within seven days. He said he would like to coordinate with Condon and Baker City on the testing. He said there is a process in place, but he needs to test it.

County Judge Scott Myers said the county currently has an Office of Emergency Management. Myers asked if Dobler’s intent was to change emergency management or include it in the process.

Dobler said it was to include emergency management.

Ted Williams, the county’s emergency management coordinator, said he had been monitoring the coronavirus and that the county health department

should be the lead agency.

Dobler said the health department was invited to work within the structure his organization has created.

“They will decide how much they will be in,” Dobler said. “Hopefully, it will be all in.”

Williams said he wanted to work together and not create redundancy by duplicating efforts. He said he worked on an emergency plan for four years.

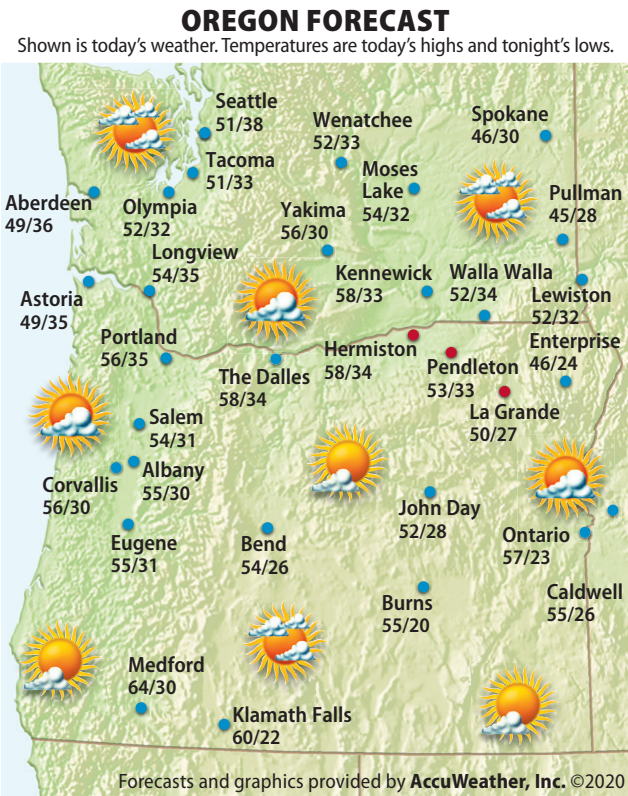
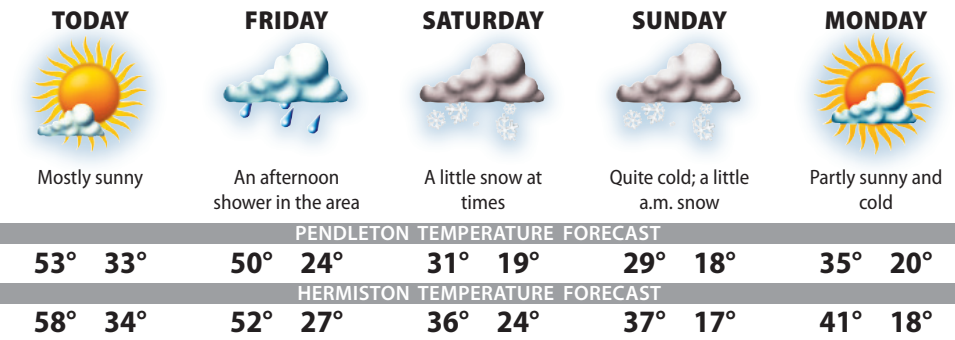
The court suggested that Williams and Dobler work together and said now, given the seriousness of the virus, is not the time for infighting.

On Monday, Williams resigned, citing concerns about the task force and the lack of an emergency plan being followed.

Williams said the emergency plan he submitted in 2019 covered pandemics, viruses and other bio-hazards, and listed the health department as the lead agency. He said he was blindsided by the creation of the task force by the sheriff’s office at Friday’s meeting.

“We have a vulnerable population in Grant County,” Williams said. “For county court and the sheriff’s office to go off on their own puts people at risk.”

Forecast for Pendleton Area



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	58°	40°
Normals	54°	34°
Records	72° (2007)	11° (2019)
PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
	Month to date	0.26"
	Normal month to date	0.41"
	Year to date	4.32"
	Last year to date	5.17"
	Normal year to date	2.96"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	61°	45°
Normals	56°	33°
Records	76° (1930)	16° (2019)
PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
	Month to date	0.02"
	Normal month to date	0.35"
	Year to date	0.38"
	Last year to date	3.43"
	Normal year to date	2.62"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Fri.
Boardman	W 3-6	NNW 6-12
Pendleton	W 6-12	NNW 6-12

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	7:13 a.m.
Sunset tonight	6:57 p.m.
Moonrise today	11:08 p.m.
Moonset today	9:09 a.m.

Last

New

First

Full

Mar 16

Mar 24

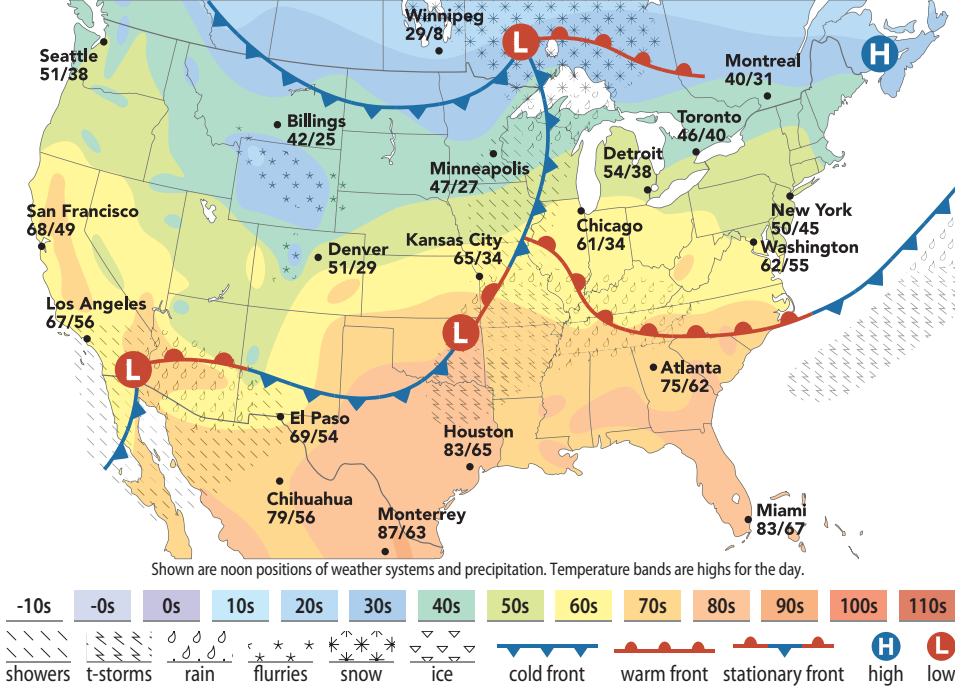
Apr 1

Apr 7

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 94° in Falfurrias, Texas Low 1° in Grand Marais, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Oregon public defenders snubbed by state lawmakers

By CONRAD WILSON
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — A bill that would’ve boosted Oregon’s public defenders died as a result of the derailed legislative session in Salem.

House Bill 4004 would’ve established performance and case standards, and eliminated a requirement for the state to run a public defense system built around being as cost effective as possible.

“That had been, I think, originally thought by people to mean the cheapest,” said Lane Borg, executive director of the state’s Office of Public Defense Services.

The bill passed in the state House overwhelmingly. But like almost every other bill in the 2020 legislative session, it stalled after Republicans walked out because of a climate change bill, denying the Oregon Legislature a quorum necessary to conduct business.

The public defense bill also would’ve expanded the commission that runs the Office of Public Defense Services from seven members to nine, and required one of the members be an individual who had received public defense services.

Last session, lawmakers failed to pass House Bill 3145, which would’ve overhauled the state’s public defense system and started the process of turning some public defenders into state employees. At the trial level, all public defenders in Oregon are contract employees of the state. Some of the attorneys work at nonprofits, while others are self-employed or work with other attorneys in consortia.

In 2019, lawmakers received a report from the nonpartisan Sixth Amendment Center, which found in the 2020 legislative session, it stalled after Republicans walked out because of a climate change bill, denying the Oregon Legislature a quorum necessary to conduct business.

The commission that oversees public defense addressed some of the largest concerns raised by the report, including a flat fee contracting model that paid attorneys per case, regardless of the hours it took. While lawmakers didn’t pass HB 3145, they pumped an additional \$38 million into the system for the 2019-21 budget; that led to about 30

additional attorneys and pay increases across the state.

Borg said there was an additional \$20 million possibility attached to the short session’s budget bill, which also did not pass after the Republican walkout. He said he hopes to get the money released through the state’s Emergency Board, which is made of a group of lawmakers who can allocate funds outside of the legislative session. There are also rumors of a possible special session.

If Oregon fails to adequately provide a public defense system that meets the needs of its clients, the state could face a lawsuit.

“With the failure of House Bill 3145 in 2019 and the failure of 4004 in the short session, I think it’s possible it could move us closer to a lawsuit,” said Carl Macpherson, executive director of Metropolitan Public Defender, a nonprofit that serves indigent clients in Multnomah and Washington counties.

The American Civil Liberties Union has sued a number of states over a lack funding to public defense: Michigan in 2007, Washington in 2011, Louisiana in 2016, Missouri and Nevada in 2017, and Idaho in 2018.

BRIEFLY

Woman pleads not guilty to sex crimes involving child

ALBANY — An Albany woman has pleaded not guilty to more than a dozen sex crimes involving an underage person.

The *Albany Democrat Herald* reports in late February, 40-year-old Tina Ketcham was charged in Linn County Circuit Court with seven sex crimes. On Monday, the number increased to 15.

Ketcham was arraigned on an indictment for six counts of rape, two counts of

sex abuse, one count of sodomy and six other sex crimes. She pleaded not guilty and was scheduled for a two-day jury trial starting in April.

The crimes allegedly occurred between 2015 and 2020, and Ketcham knew the victim.

Judge Brendan Kane has maintained Ketcham’s bail at \$350,000, denying a request for reduced security.

The Albany Police Department began investigating the case in February.

— Associated Press

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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