

LOCAL & STATE

State workers to get pay hike

Also settled on as budget talks begin is \$500 million for teacher pay increases

By John Kennedy
Gannett Florida

TALLAHASSEE — A 3%, across-the-board pay raise for state workers emerged as one of the first deals settled as negotiations started Saturday between House and Senate conferees trying to finalize a roughly \$92 billion state budget.

Pay raises have rarely been handed out to the state's public employee work force by the Republican-controlled Legislature.

But the House and Senate early on this election year both came up with dueling pay hike proposals and included them in budget blueprints the two sides are now trying to reconcile.

As talks began Saturday, Senate budget chief Rob Bradley, R-Fleming Island, said the 3% across-the-board boost, which had been the Senate's approach, was agreed on.

"It's been said that war is hell, but keeping peace is not that easy either," House Speaker Jose Oliva, R-Miami, told budget negotiators as they began talks.

Most state workers have received pay increases only in two of the past 12 years,

and lost 3% of their salaries to new pension contributions required by Republican lawmakers in 2011.

According to the state Department of Management Services, there are about 90,000 employees in the state personnel system.

The pay hike was among a handful of issues settled as lawmakers approach the legislative session's home stretch. The Legislature's final scheduled day is Friday, but lawmakers are already talking about extending that deadline by a couple of days.

Among the deals cut was a decision to finance

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Florida Senate President Bill Galvano, left, and House Speaker Jose Oliva, far right, address lawmakers on Saturday at the state Capitol in Tallahassee. As lawmakers continue to negotiate on the state budget, the House and Senate have settled on a few issues, including a 3% pay raise for state workers and \$500 million for increased teacher pay. [BOBBY CAINA CALVAN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

COMMUNITY BRIEF

Senior menu

These meals will be provided by Marion Senior Services, 1101 SW 20th Court, Ocala. Lunch delivered by Meals on Wheels and served at congregate sites; dinner at Marion Senior Services. Call 620-3501.

Monday: Sausage & bean casserole, collard greens, mandarin oranges, corn muffin, margarine cup, graham crackers, 1% low-fat milk.

Tuesday: BBQ chicken thigh, pinto beans, rosemary diced potatoes, whole-grain bread, margarine cup, peaches, 1% low-fat milk.

Wednesday: Hamburger (beef patty, whole-grain bun), baked beans, tater tots, ketchup, mustard, mixed fruit, fat-free chocolate milk.

Thursday: Chicken salad, tossed salad, three-bean salad, Italian dressing, whole-wheat bread, margarine cup, pineapple, 1% low-fat milk.

Friday: Irish stew, steamed cabbage, green peas, rye bread, special holiday dessert, 1% low-fat milk. ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION

Special forum on women's mental health set for Saturday

Women's Mental Health Forum: Faces of Depression will be held 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at the Florida Department of Health in Marion County, 1801 SE 32nd Ave., Ocala. It will be presented by Woman 2 Woman International. The forum will feature "personal stories on how they (the speakers) faced depression and how to become more aware of the signs and symptoms," according to organizers. RSVP at 653-5122 or eventbrite.

Workforce conference set for April 23

CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion is hosting a conference, "Focusing on Your 21st Century Workforce," from 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 23 at the Circle Square Cultural Center, 8395 SW 80th St., Ocala. "Bringing together businesses, community and public partners, education leaders and HR professionals, the conference examines visionary practices for retaining a workforce critical to the region's economic prosperity and quality of life," organizers said in a news release. Tickets are \$25 and include breakfast and lunch. To register, go to 2020workforce.eventbrite.com. The deadline is April 17.

Friends of the Belleview Library book sale coming in April

Friends of the Belleview Library will hold their Spring Book Sale from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 23-25 at the Friends Book Nook, 6007 SE Earp Road, Belleview. Proceeds benefit the library. For information, call 245-2767 or visit www.facebook.com/FOBLBookNook.

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Legendary springs



ABOVE: Gil Weede, 4, sits next to Marla Lawrenz, of Florida Merfolk of Valrico, on the dock during the annual Florida SpringsFest 2020 held at Silver Springs State Park on Saturday. Attendees learned about the history and science behind the Florida springs while enjoying entertainment, activities, vendors and food. The park admission was \$2 and the Glass Bottom Boat rides were half price. [PHOTOS DOUG ENGLE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER]



RIGHT: Lynn Sluder, of Florida Merfolk of Valrico, swims in the Mermaid aquarium during the annual Florida SpringsFest 2020 at Silver Springs State Park on Saturday as Jenna Chandler, top, performed a scarf dance.



Silver Springs Boat Captain Oscar Collins, left, stops to tell a quick story as people waited in line to ride the glass bottom boats Saturday. Collins along with four other boat captains, were honored Saturday during the annual Florida SpringsFest 2020 at Silver Springs State Park. The captains of the glass bottom boats were recognized and honored by the governor with a proclamation.

Sunny, warm week in the forecast

By Emily Mavrakis
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After weeks of temperature fluctuations from freezing to balmy, a steady increase in overall temperatures is expected in North Central Florida this week.

Highs are expected to start off in the upper-70s before gradually rising to the mid-80s by the week-end. Overnight lows are expected to remain in the mid- to upper-50s.

Here is this week's forecast:

Today: Mostly sunny, with a high near 77 degrees. Light and variable wind becoming east 5 to 10

mph in the morning.

Tonight: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 54 degrees. East wind 5 to 8 mph.

Tuesday: Partly sunny, with a high near 79 degrees. Light and variable wind becoming southeast 5 to 8 mph in the morning.

Tuesday night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 56 degrees.

Wednesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 82 degrees.

Wednesday night: Mostly clear, with a low around 57 degrees.

Thursday: Sunny, with a high near 83 degrees.

Thursday night:

Mostly clear, with a low around 56 degrees.

Friday: Sunny, with a high near 83 degrees.

Friday night: Mostly clear, with a low around 58 degrees.

Saturday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 85 degrees.

The National Weather Service issues the official forecast for Marion County and surrounding areas. The Star Banner uses AccuWeather forecasts on its weather page, which are sometimes different than official weather service predictions.

Cruise ship off coast awaiting tests for virus

By Tony Doris
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

A cruise ship is sailing off the coast of Florida on Sunday awaiting tests for the coronavirus from two crew members, the Miami Herald reported.

Princess Cruise Line's Regal Princess was supposed to dock in Port Everglades Sunday morning. The Herald is reporting that the crew members had transferred to the Regal Princess from the Grand Princess cruise ship in California, which has 21 positive cases of the virus. The Herald reported that the crew members are not showing symptoms of the virus, the company said.

The South Florida Sun-Sentinel reported that the Regal Princess set sail for the Caribbean out of Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale a week ago.

As of Sunday morning the virus had spread to eight Florida counties, with 12 cases diagnosed and two deaths.

The deaths, announced Friday, were a 72-year-old Santa Rosa County man and a Lee County woman in her 70s. They are the first deaths attributed to the virus on the East Coast of the U.S..

In response, Gov. Ron DeSantis activated the state's emergency operations center to "Level 2" status Saturday to support efforts to contain the coronavirus, which causes the COVID-19 disease.

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Coronavirus: What you should do now

Don't panic! Remember that 80 percent of the cases are mild. The most susceptible are people with weaker immune systems such as the elderly and those with diabetes.

The best thing to do: Make sure you wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before eating, after going to the bathroom and after sneezing or coughing.

Do not run out and buy face masks. The CDC does not recommend people who are well wear masks. Masks are recommended for sick people to keep infected droplets out of the air, for health care workers and for people caring for a person who is ill. Cover your mouth when you cough and stay home if you are sick.

More from the CDC can be found at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html