

POST NEWS

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PAGE THREE

NEWS IN BRIEF

DENVER HOSPITALS OWED MILLIONS IN UNPAID MEDICAID CLAIMS

After Colorado launched a new technology system to handle reimbursements for Medicaid claims, hospitals across the state are still owed millions of dollars. The Colorado Hospital Association released data last week that indicated five individual hospitals and five hospital systems were owed nearly \$211 million in claims after the first four months of the new system that launched in March, *The Denver Post* reported.

The lack of payments is causing hospitals, especially in rural areas, to struggle, said Julie Lonborg, the association's vice president for communications. She said the issue is reaching an unsustainable level, and hospitals fear they might not be able to treat nonemergency Medicaid patients.

Susan Birch, Health Care Policy and Financing Department executive director, said the new system operated by DXC Technology will bring the state into federal compliance and will help it pay Medicaid claims more accurately. The department facilitates the Medicaid program in the state.

Under the new system, \$4.3 billion has been paid in 28 million claims so far. Medicaid officials said the system currently has 98,000 claims waiting for review. When the system returns to normal operations, they expect to have 30,000 claims awaiting review within 10 business days.

DENVER GOVERNOR CREATES ADVISER POSITION TO COMBAT AGING

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper has announced he will use grant money to create a new senior adviser position whose job will solely focus on issues related to an aging population.

The Denver Post reports Hickenlooper announced the new position on Sept. 19, saying the grant money comes from the NextFifty Initiative, a nonprofit created from the proceeds of the sale of the senior-care company InnovAge. The grant provides \$450,000 to fund the position for three years.

The State Demography Office states that nearly one out of every five Colorado residents will be over the age of 65 by 2040. In

2010, slightly more than one out of every 10 Coloradans was over 65. Hickenlooper said the search to fill the position will begin immediately.

DENVER SOME LOW-LEVEL RADIOACTIVE WASTE HANDLED ILLEGALLY

Some types of low-level radioactive waste have been illegally buried in landfills that are not approved to handle them because of a contradiction in state laws, Colorado health officials said Sept. 22.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment said the Legislature needs to change the laws so the agency has the authority to regulate the waste.

The problem was first reported by *The Denver Post*.

The agency said it did not know how much of the waste is involved but does not believe it is an imminent threat to public health.

The waste is material that is naturally radioactive and has been used or disturbed by an industrial or manufacturing process, the agency said. It is known as technically enhanced, naturally occurring radioactive material. The radioactivity is usually an unwanted component of the material, said Martha Rudolph, director of environmental programs for the health department.

State law prevents the health department from regulating that kind of waste unless the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency does, and the EPA has not set any rules, Rudolph said. Another state law, however, requires any radioactive material to be buried in landfills with extra precautions including liners and other protective barriers, she said.

Without the legal authority, the department cannot set rules to enforce that law, she said. As a result, some of that type of waste is going into regular landfills that do not have the extra precautions.

DENVER PITCH TO BUILD HYPERLOOP WOULD COST \$24 BILLION

Colorado's dream of a futuristic transportation system that would move passengers and freight at speeds of nearly 700

See BRIEFS, Page 5



Norwood cooks

Tri-County Health Network and the Local Food Initiative teamed up to produce a Cooking Matters class in Norwood. Led by Gina Boyce, Catherine Petersen, Carol Fitzmorris and Patti Royer, the team worked with nine students to teach them to use fresh, seasonal and local produce. (Photo by Leila Seraphin)

COLORADO

State pension board calls for higher contributions

Calls for benefits cuts, too

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The board that oversees Colorado state pensions on Sept. 22 recommended higher contributions from employees and taxpayers along with cuts to retirees' benefits, arguing that the changes are necessary to shore up the underfunded pension system.

The Denver Post first reported the board's recommendations, which came at the end of a three-day retreat at a resort in Colorado Springs. Lawmakers must approve the changes as well.

The Public Employees' Retirement Association is 58.1 percent funded, down from 62.1 percent in December of 2015, and more than 560,000 rely on it for retirement savings, according to the latest financial report on the pension system.

The recommendations include cutting the annual cost of living adjustment from 2 percent that most retirees get to 1.5 percent, and making 65

the eligible age for full retirement benefits for any employees who are hired starting in 2020.

The board also recommended increasing most employee contributions by 3 percent starting in 2020 to 11 percent total, plus increasing taxpayers' payments toward the fund by 2 percent. For school districts, that adds up to an additional \$86 million a year and \$54 million for the state government division in additional pension costs.

"The recommendations from the PERA Board reflect our commitment to ensuring the long-term health of the fund," Chairman Timothy O'Brien said in a statement following the meeting. "We understand that these recommended changes will not be easy, but we believe shared impact across the membership and with employers are absolutely necessary."

The last dramatic changes to the pension system came

in 2010, when lawmakers approved benefit cuts and increased contributions over several years.

The latest proposal also asks lawmakers to give up some control over setting rates. The board's package includes an automatic increase to contributions and cuts to cost of living adjustments based on the pension's finances.

PERA's Executive Director Gregory Smith said in a statement that the system will work with lawmakers to ensure the proposal "receives serious consideration" during next year's legislative session.

"These changes impact every member, whether they are still working or retired, and will require difficult sacrifices," Smith said. "These modifications represent the ability of the plan to adapt to our changing environment while retaining the overall value of PERA for our membership, our employers, and Colorado."

FRACKING

Appeals court sidesteps decision on U.S. regulations

Environmentalists say it could take years to undo laws

By DAN ELLIOTT
The Associated Press

A federal appeals court last week sidestepped a decision on whether oil and gas regulations enacted by the Obama administration are legal, noting that the cur-

rent administration plans to rescind them.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver said it would be a waste of time to rule on the regulations, which govern hydraulic fracturing on federal lands, because the

Trump administration has already begun the process of revoking them.

The ruling left the status of the regulations unclear, and neither the federal Bureau

See FRACKING, Page 6

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