

Are pension woes really understated?

By John Hanna
AP Political Writer

TOPEKA — As Kansas officials grapple with long-term woes confronting the state's pension system for teachers and government workers, they face the important but little-debated question of whether the problems, as huge as they seem, are actually bigger than they've been portrayed.

The projected gap is almost \$7.7 billion between the anticipated long-term revenues for the state's pension system and the promises made to public employees and retirees for the next several decades. That's almost \$2,700 for each Kansas resident.

But two longstanding practices of the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System mean the figure could be even larger. First, the system has assumed for 25 years that over time, it will earn an average return of 8 percent on its investments. Secondly, the system averages investment gains and losses over five years, a process known as "smoothing," common to U.S. public pension systems.

Those practices draw criticism from at least a few conservative economists, who worry that pub-

lic pension systems are hiding the true size of their long-term funding gaps, or unfunded liabilities. Public employee groups are suspicious of such claims, seeing a desire to push states toward starting 401(k)-style plans and away from traditional plans guaranteeing benefits up front based upon a worker's salary and years of service.

The state's current plan is known as a "defined benefit" plan, where pensions are guaranteed up front but the state has to find a way to pay them later. Investment plans like a 401(k) are called "defined contribution," where the payout depends on how well the plan performs, but the state fulfills its obligation up front. Most corporations have switched to that type of plan because of the threat of big "unfunded" liabilities.

Kansas legislators haven't challenged either practice much as they've considered overhauling the state pension system. But when the system's board of trustees meets May 20, it is expected to consider whether it should stick with its assumed rate for investment earnings or decrease it, something that would increase the unfunded liability.

'Law and Order' comedy next week on Golden Plains Middle School stage

By Judy Rogers
Golden Plains High School

Golden Plains Middle School students have been busy preparing for their upcoming play, "Law & Order: Fairy Tale Unit," to be presented at 7 p.m. on Thursday, April 28.

The script is based on the popular television series with a fairy-tale twist.

"In the fairy tale criminal justice system," a synopsis says, "the characters from fairy tales and nursery rhymes are represented by two separate yet equally ridiculous groups: the fairy tale police, who investigate fairy tale crime, and the fairy tale district attorneys, who prosecute fairy tale offenders. These are their stories."

All students at the school have at least one on-stage part. The cast has been working hard to memorize lines, prepare the set and create believable characters.

"The students have been working hard on developing their acting skills," said director Ashley Amberger. "I would encourage everyone to come out and sup-



JUDY ROGERS/Golden Plains High School

The students at Golden Plains Middle School have been designing the set and props for the upcoming school play, "Law and Order: Fairy Tale Unit," to be presented on Thursday, April 28. Working on April 7 were (from left) Jessica Koerperich, Gabrielle Schiltz, Ana Bermudez, Jesus Aragon and Kami Miller.

The sophomore class plans an ice cream social prior to and immediately following the play.

Keep on your toes this week; change is in the works according to stars

Aries (March 21 – April 20) You face the challenge to ensure that you're not asleep at the wheel. This is likely to push quite a few buttons on both the personal and relationship front. Yet this is a timely wake up call, with a breakthrough underway by midweek.

Taurus (April 21 – May 21) This is the week everything changes. You're spending a lot of time in your head. Yet stick your head out of the clouds and get a sense of where you're going. All of a sudden you can see where you're going.

Gemini (May 22 – June 21) Even though there is a professional focus at the start of the week, you're under the spell of the long weekend ahead. You've been missing out in the playful and romantic area, especially if you've been held back by others' opinions. All of a sudden you'll feel a need to slow down, pull over and take time out to recharge your batteries.

Cancer (June 22 – July 22) This is a



Shannon O'Brien

• Weekly Horoscope

breakthrough week on the professional front. It's a Full Moon in your home and family sector on Monday. This is the last real hurdle you'll have to face, for the weekend's a chance for a do over and likely to motivate you.

Leo (July 23 – Aug. 22) Even though this is a short working week, chances are waiting for the weekend will be too long. As well as challenging your excuses, this is likely to evoke a feeling of being trapped or held back. The passions and fighting spirit this evokes cause you to fight back, while barriers reveal themselves as simply mirages.

Virgo (Aug. 23 – Sept. 23) Things are

brought to a head, to fruition or to your attention Monday, with a breakthrough on the income front. The price is short-term financial pressure. Yet by as early as Wednesday a breakthrough will be underway, gather speed Thursday and gain momentum over the weekend. By then you'll be less inclined to sweat the small stuff.

Libra (Sept. 24 – Oct. 23) Start playing like you mean it, stand your ground, during what is likely to be a defining week on the work and relationship fronts. Despite some relationship pressure, this lays the seeds for a breakthrough that will be well underway by mid week.

Scorpio (Oct. 24 – Nov. 22) As you move into the short working week make a conscious choice to leave your superhero clock hanging in the wardrobe, refusing to push yourself or to place expectations on yourself that will only make things worse. While there is a breakthrough underway on the work front and your energy, drive

and enthusiasm will be bouncing back, there are some roadblocks to get through at the start of the week. Work with the conditions and physical limitations, doing what you can, from where you're at without pushing yourself.

Sagittarius (Nov. 23 – Dec. 21) There is a breakthrough underway, creating both a need and a chance to find balance. The Sun is opening the door to a period of activity on the work front that won't run its course until June 2012. You can't wait this out, making it important to establish balance between work and play from the get go.

Capricorn (Dec. 22 – Jan. 20) Balance the scales between your home and professional lives and gain an edge as well. This allows you to win an important professional battle, needed to ensure things don't become stuck, though the war itself is aimed at finding balance between your home and professional lives.

Aquarius (Jan. 21 – Feb. 19) Despite pressure at the start of the week, the full moon creates an opportunity for a breakthrough. Falling in an adventurous part of your chart, this will always challenge your excuses. However, with a long weekend ahead and with mental savvy and communication skills to plan for constructive time out, this simply challenges you to stop hiding behind excuses.

Pisces (Feb. 20 – March 20) Despite the financial intensity at the start of the week, there is the potential for a real breakthrough. While this is a big week for money matters, it's important that you don't make it all about money. Look beyond what is, getting the kind of personal intentions that will keep the rest of your year on track.

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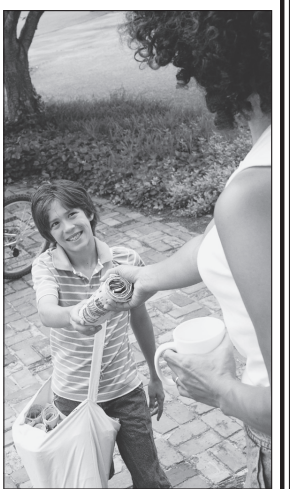
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