

REGIONAL BRIEFS

AuCoin closes House account

PORTLAND (AP) — After news reports that he was one of the members of Congress who bounced checks at the House of Representatives' bank, Rep. Les AuCoin has decided to pay a fee for the checks and close the account, an aide said Wednesday.

Bob Crane said AuCoin inadvertently bounced seven checks over a two-day period in August of 1989. He said AuCoin promptly covered the deficit when he found out about it.

But the Oregon Democrat has decided to voluntarily pay a \$25 fee for each bounced check and will close the account, Crane said.

The Statesman-Journal newspaper in Salem reported Wednesday that AuCoin was one of the members of Congress who bounced checks at the bank. The checks are automatically covered and no fee is charged.

A General Accounting Office report released Sept. 18 disclosed that House members bounced 8,331 checks written on accounts at the House bank during the calendar year 1990. The report said 134 members wrote 581 bad checks of \$1,000 or more.

The largest bounced check AuCoin wrote, Crane said, was for \$125.

Health care receives support

WASHINGTON (AP) — Citing broad support from labor, business and health groups, the chairman of a House committee offered his influential support Wednesday for Oregon's effort to revamp its health care for the poor.

"We will want to take a closer look at the Oregon Plan, but it is clear from our investigation that it is, at a minimum, a promising concept," Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., said.

"In light of Oregon's strong commitments to adequate financing and protections for vulnerable populations, this plan is a reasoned effort to deal with the limits of what is actually needed and what we can afford to pay."

Dingell is chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee as well as its subcommittee on oversight and investigations, which held a hearing Wednesday on state and local perspectives on Medicaid.

His support is crucial to Oregon's request that the federal government grant the state a waiver from existing Medicaid guidelines, said an aide to Rep. Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

Oregon wants the waiver so it can in-

crease the number of people eligible for medical care at public expense by restricting the types of medical service they receive.

Washington jobless rate climbs

OLYMPIA (AP) — Washington's unemployment rate in August jumped by 1.2 percentage points over the same month last year, a powerful signal that the state's once-torrid economy has cooled significantly, officials said Wednesday.

The August rate of 5.4 percent was down by half a percentage point from July, but this drop was seen by the state Employment Security Department as typical for the month, when the number of seasonal jobs falls.

The highest jobless rate for the month was in Skamania County at 16.7 percent. The lowest was in Garfield County at 1 percent.

The unemployment leap from a year ago, when the rate stood at 4.2 percent, shows that the state's prosperity has dimmed significantly, said an economist with the department, Dennis Fusco.

"What it (the annual drop) represents is a tremendous slowing in the rate of employment expansion," Fusco said. The drop in job growth began to show up in February, he said.

BP fined for safety violations

OLYMPIA (AP) — Civil penalties totaling \$78,250 have been assessed against BP America for more than 700 alleged health and safety violations at the company's Ferndale refinery, the Department of Labor and Industries reported Wednesday.

The six-month inspection that resulted in the penalties was not related directly to an explosion at the refinery in January, but the plant was chosen for the comprehensive investigation because of hazards identified during investigation of the blast, department Assistant Director Nick Kirchoff said.

One worker was killed and six others were injured in the explosion. BP was fined \$135,710 for that accident. Kirchoff said the company has appealed the penalty.

The department issued two citations following the most recent inspection, proposing \$58,130 in penalties for safety violations and \$20,120 in penalties for health violations.

Timber coalition proposes spotted owl compromise



WASHINGTON (AP) — A timber industry coalition said Wednesday the northern spotted owl can be saved from extinction without significant cutbacks in Forest Service logging plans calling for 3.8 billion board feet in annual Northwest sales.

Five biologists representing timber companies and the American Forest Resource Alliance said they have come up with their own recovery plan to maintain the threatened owl's population.

"Over time, this strategy has the ability to increase owl population," said Lorin Hicks, manager of wildlife and fish resources for Plum Creek Timber Co. Inc. of Seattle.

"It strikes a much-needed balance between the needs of the owls and the needs of people in the region," added Ross Mickey, western Oregon manager for the Northwest Forestry Association based in Eugene.

The plan temporarily would prohibit logging on about 1.8 million acres of public forests currently open to harvests in Oregon, Washington and northern California.

But the major source of owl protection would be 2.2 million acres of national parks and permanent wilderness areas already established and another 2.1 million acres of federal lands already temporarily protected from logging under existing forest plans and agency decisions.

The proposal would create no permanent owl reserves on lands not already off-limits to logging.

Current Forest Service plans call for 3.8 billion board feet of timber to be cut annually in Oregon and Washington. Those harvests would fall to about 2.6 billion board feet under a conservation strategy offered in April 1990 by Forest Service biologist Jack Ward Thomas and

a panel of government scientists.

Mickey said the industry's recovery plan could yield the full 3.8 billion board feet annually by continuing logging on most forest lands, but providing more sensitive management and selective cutting of areas inhabited by owls.

He said the low-end estimate of harvests under the proposal would be 3.2 billion to 3.4 billion board feet.

The 1.8 million acres where logging temporarily would be banned under the industry plan are divided into 940,000 acres of "deferred areas" and 831,000 acres of "research areas."

The deferred areas are necessary to fill in gaps between suitable habitat found in national parks and wilderness areas, said James Sweeney, director of wildlife ecology for the American Forest Resource Alliance.

Logging would be allowed in the deferred areas "only if and when it can be shown it is fully compatible with the owl," he said, adding that could be a matter of years or decades.

The research areas are believed to be places where some selective logging practices could be conducted without a threat to the owl, he said. Research proposals would be established for such experimental logging.

The coalition presented its proposal to the Department of the Interior's recovery team, which is scheduled to release its proposed recovery plan by the end of the year.

Bob Anderson, wildlife research biologist for the Weyerhaeuser Co. of Federal Way, Wash., and Steve Self, wildlife biologist for Sierra Pacific Industries of California, also helped prepare the industry plan.

Men win in toxic water case

SALEM (AP) — The Oregon Court of Appeals on Wednesday upheld awards of more than \$1.6 million in damages to two men who claimed they suffered severe problems due to toxic metals in an apartment complex's hot water.

The court affirmed a Multnomah County Circuit Court jury's awards in 1989 to Verne Boger and Monte Irwin, who lived at the Halsey Station Townhouses in Troutdale.

They presented evidence that they suffered brain damage and other ailments they claimed were caused by concentrations of toxic metals in hot water heaters and hot water at the complex.

The awards included \$850,000 in punitive damages. The jury awarded \$912,000 to Irwin and \$718,000 to Boger.

Defendants to the lawsuit include the Norris & Stevens Inc., Portland, managing agent for the complex, and Jim and Mary Lou Day, the resident managers.

One argument by the managers was that evidence that aluminum and other metals are toxic enough to produce the injuries suffered by Boger and Irwin lacked enough acceptance in the scientific community to be admitted as evidence.

The appeals court said the evidence was sufficiently reliable to be admissible.

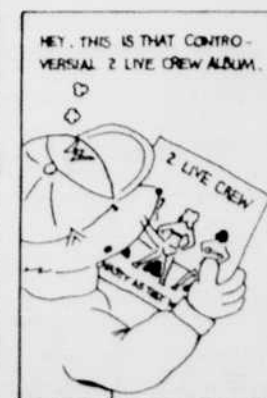
The appeals also rejected an effort to challenge the expertise of two of the plaintiff's witnesses and disagreed with a defense argument that the jury shouldn't have considered the claim for punitive damages.

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