

News digest

Promoting safe ownership

SALEM — Encouraged by voter approval of her measure to expand background checks to all gun show sales, Sen. Ginny Burdick said Tuesday she is drawing up a bill to persuade gun owners to use trigger locks or other safe storage devices to protect children.

The Portland Democrat said the overwhelming voter passage of Measure 5 in the November election shows that even in gun-crazy Oregon, where more than half the state's households have firearms, there is popular support for laws promoting responsible ownership.

As it stands now, however, there are many households around the state where children still have access to unsecured firearms, she said.

Burdick's legislation, similar to a bill she sponsored in 1999, would create the crime of unlawful storage of a firearm, punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

Gun owners could be convicted if they leave a gun where a person under 16 could find it, and the youth subsequently takes the gun to a public place, brandishes it in a careless or threatening manner, or injures and kills someone with the firearm.

Burdick's bill would create an

"affirmative defense" for those gun owners if they could show that they tried to keep the gun from being misused by children by outfitting it with a trigger lock or placing it in a locked container.

But John Hellen of Oregon Gun Owners, which tried unsuccessfully to defeat Burdick's Measure 5 in last fall's election, said his organization will work to derail Burdick's latest gun control effort in the Legislature.

Hellen said the bill's definition of "safe storage" is vague and could still leave gun owners at risk legally even if they take steps to keep unsecured weapons out of the hands of children.

Time has changed

SEATTLE — As Seattle Times employees who spent seven weeks on strike begin returning to work Wednesday, many will go back with the belief their newspaper will never be the same.

"I think all of us aren't really sure what to expect," said Chuck Taylor, an aerospace reporter who has been managing editor of the strike newspaper, the Seattle Union Record.

"It was an adversarial relationship for the last seven weeks. Hurtful things were said on both sides. I

think everyone is probably anxious and cautious about going back in."

Times Managing Editor Alex MacLeod said 15 to 20 people who had been on strike would return to their jobs in the newsroom Wednesday.

Members of the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild on Monday approved the newspaper's contract offer 359-116. Although the strike began over pay, at the end the sticking point was who would return to work and when. A settlement was finally reached last week after U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., intervened to call the two sides together.

Building ban debated

BOISE, Idaho — The Idaho Land Board filed suit in federal court Tuesday, seeking to overturn the Clinton administration decision to ban road-building on 58.5 million acres of national forest where no roads currently exist.

Attorney General Al Lance, on the board overseeing income from state property, filed the suit in U.S. District Court in Boise. He alleged the Forest Service analysis was inadequate under the National Environmental Policy Act's requirements for research and public comment.

"From the beginning, the administration's process was designed to reach a predetermined conclusion," Lance said. "In October of 1999, President Clinton announced he wanted a rule mandating roadless conditions."

"He described his plan was one of the largest land preservation efforts in American history," Lance said. "To no one's surprise, only 15 months later the president signed a rule mandating roadless conditions."

The suit follows one filed Monday by a coalition including Boise Cascade Corp., two mountain counties, snowmobile advocates and Emmett rancher Brad Little.

Gunman kills 3

HOUSTON — A man apparently engaged in a feud with a Houston business shot and killed three people there Tuesday before he also died of a gunshot wound, authorities said.

The gunman's fatal wound may have been self-inflicted in the noon-time gunfire at Amko Trading, a wholesale clothing and perfume store.

Police spokeswoman Silvia Trevino said two women and one man were found dead inside the store. It wasn't immediately clear if the dead were employees or customers, Trevino said.

The suspected gunman died at Ben Taub General Hospital of a gunshot wound to the head, police spokesman Robert Hurst said.

Hostilities continue

JERUSALEM — Despite efforts by the U.S. administration to bring a partial agreement or a statement of principles out of the Israelis and Palestinians before President Clinton leaves office, the chief Palestinian negotiator said Tuesday that Palestinians want a full peace treaty or nothing.

The declaration by negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo further dimmed prospects for a diplomatic achievement for Clinton, who finishes his term Jan. 20, and for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, trailing far behind a hard-line rival as a Feb. 6 election looms.

Meanwhile, hostilities persisted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A 70-year-old man was shot and killed on his farm near an Israeli settlement in Gaza, although the circumstances were unclear. Palestinian police said there were no clashes there. The Israeli military was checking.

Israeli forces killed a 27-year-old Palestinian during a West Bank

rock-throwing clash, Palestinians said. The shooting brought the death toll in violence that broke out Sept. 28 to 364, most of them Palestinians.

Eclipse draws crowd

TEHRAN, Iran — As a lunar eclipse darkened the night sky over parts of the Eastern Hemisphere on Tuesday, tens of thousands gathered on rooftops in the Persian Gulf region to watch the moon and say prayers marveling the powers of God.

"I didn't want to miss this opportunity and I waited on the rooftop to watch the eclipse until the end. It gives me a stronger trust in God," said Farida Ahmadi, a 39-year-old architect and mother.

The partial eclipse began at 10:15 p.m. in Iran and became total an hour later. State radio and television called on Iranians to perform the ayat prayers, a Muslim ritual designed to marvel at the powers of God.

The eclipse was very apparent through much of the Persian Gulf region, in Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Yemen.

Lunar eclipses are associated in Iraq with a popular children's story about a moon that is "eaten by the great big whale." During past eclipses, tens of thousands of children flooded the streets, singing songs and begging the "whale" to give the moon back.

Kumbh Mela celebrated

ALLAHABAD, India — Millions of Hindus, hands clasped in prayer, plunged into the icy Ganges River hoping to wash away their sins at the opening of a festival that falls every 12 years — and is especially auspicious Tuesday because of the lunar eclipse.

"I have come here to get a new life, to wash away the sins I have committed in the last few years," says Pratap Garh, a teacher wearing only a loincloth as temperatures dropped to 38 degrees.

Millions flocked Tuesday to a sacred riverbank on the first day of the Kumbh Mela festival and as many as 65 million are anticipated to dip into the river's chilly waters for a holy bath during the 43-day celebration.

Kumbh Mela derives its name from a Hindu myth that tells how the gods and demons fought over a "kumbh," or pot, of nectar that would give them immortality. Legend has it that one of the gods ran off with the pot, spilling four drops of nectar near four blessed cities.



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