

Today	Tuesday	Wednesday
High: 53 Low: 37 Precip: 50%	High: 55 Low: 38 Precip: 0%	High: 60 Low: 39 Precip: 10%

IN BRIEF

Iraqis cast votes in defiance of threats, boycott calls

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Iraqis embraced democracy in large numbers Sunday, standing in long lines to vote in defiance of mortar attacks, suicide bombers and boycott calls. Pushed in wheelchairs or carts if they couldn't walk, the elderly, the young and women in veils cast ballots in Iraq's first free election in a half-century. Iraqi election officials said it might take 10 days to determine the vote's winner and said they had no firm estimate of turnout among the 14 million eligible voters. The ticket endorsed by the Shiite Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani was the pre-voting favorite. Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's slate was also considered strong.

Bush declares Sunday's election in Iraq a success

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President Bush called Sunday's elections in Iraq a success and promised the United States will continue trying to prepare Iraqis to secure their own country. "The world is hearing the voice of freedom from the center of the Middle East," Bush told reporters at the White House on Sunday, four hours after the polls closed. He did not take questions after his three-minute statement.

Marine, war veteran in coma receives new liver

LOMA LINDA, Calif. — With little time left before his organs would likely fail, a U.S. Marine received a new liver Sunday for a mysterious ailment doctors said would kill him if he didn't get a transplant. Doctors operated on Lance Cpl. Chris LeBleu, who had been in a coma and on life support, for nearly 12 hours Sunday after an unidentified donor from New Mexico was found late Saturday night.

230,000 without power after Georgia ice storm

ATLANTA — More than 230,000 customers had no electricity Sunday in Georgia while crews worked to repair power lines snapped by an ice storm, and the city's airport reopened all its runways as temperatures rose above freezing. Two traffic deaths in Georgia and one in South Carolina were allegedly caused by the storm that spread sleet and freezing rain across parts of the Southeast on Saturday.

Legislators move to repeal school zone speed limit law

SALEM — Seven months after it took effect, some 50 legislators are on board to repeal a law that restricts speeds at marked school crossings to 20 mph at all times.

There's even a move afoot to refund fines paid by those ticketed under the law.

The law won near-unanimous approval in the last legislative session, and the state spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on new signs.

The new bill calls for a 20 mph limit in school zones only when children are present at crosswalks or when a flashing light indicates children may be arriving or leaving.

The old law imposed the limit 24 hours a day, every day.

— The Associated Press

LTD strike averted for at least 35 days

An independent auditor will examine the proposed driver contract

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF
SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

Amalgamated Transit Union division 757 has agreed to enter a 35-day cooling off period in its contract negotiations with Lane Transit District, averting a driver strike that would have left busses immobile and thousands of people who depend on their service seeking alternative transportation.

A committee consisting of citizens from Eugene and Springfield formed last week to intervene in the negotiation process and persuade both sides to enter a cooling-off period, allowing time for an independent auditor to examine the contract and see where the negotiations have broken down. The union voted unanimously Sunday night to accept the committee's offer.

"A strike will not happen for the next 35 days, or until the committee comes forward with their recommendation," ATU Vice President Jonathan Hunt said.

ATU officials had announced at a rally Saturday their intentions to strike Tuesday at 12:01 a.m. if Sunday's mediation session did not produce changes in LTD's proposed contract, which they say is inadequate in areas ranging from health care coverage to the amount of time allotted to inspect the safety of the busses.

Committee co-organizer Claire Syrett spoke at the ATU rally Saturday, asking for both sides to continue seeking alternatives to a driver strike "because it would be wrong for both parties not to try to find another way."

Syrett said she will deliver an official request on Monday to LTD and ATU, accompanied by letters from Rep. Bob Ackerman, D-Eugene, Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, Rep. Debi Farr, R-Eugene, Rep. Elizabeth Terry Beyer, D-Springfield, and Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, asking for a continuation of the negotiation process.

LTD officials still have to accept the committee's offer and agree to pay for half of the auditor's fees, Hunt said.

LTD officials said last week that the contract they proposed on Jan. 27 may be the best LTD would be able to offer.

"I don't know that LTD is going to be coming back with any ability to stretch beyond what we've already offered," Vobora said on Friday.

Syrett said she and the other committee members are hopeful a strike can be avoided and were encouraged by the welcoming response ATU officials gave her at Saturday's rally.

"I was pleased with the



TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTOGRAPHER

Tom Stry, a Lane Transit District bus driver, waves to other LTD workers as they march around the bus mall on 10th Avenue and Olive Street on Saturday. At Sunday's negotiations, the drivers agreed to wait for a 35-day 'cooling off' period before going on strike.

reaction not only of the ATU leadership but some of the general membership," Syrett said. "They seemed relieved that some other members in the community were stepping up to try to find another solution to the problem."

Al Zullo, president of ATU division 757, spoke after Syrett and said the committee's offer of outside expertise was appreciated.

"We need to find out who's right and who's wrong here and your committee can do that," Zullo said.

Union officials spoke to a crowd of about 150 people in a meeting room at the Eugene Public Library on Saturday before rallying at the LTD station chanting a series of pro-union chants with signs denouncing LTD General Manager Ken Hamm and the LTD Board of Directors.

"The employees of LTD haven't failed," ATU executive board officer for division 757 Carol Allred said. "It's the leaders of LTD that have failed."

Allred was joined by Zullo, Hunt and numerous union supporters and community members who spoke in support of the pending strike, emphasizing the importance of supporting labor movements that maintain a standard of family-wage jobs throughout the state.

"We feel like we set the standard in this community and we're not willing to join the downward spiral," Allred told the crowd. "We're fighting for all of you."

Lane County Commissioner Peter Sorenson spoke in support of ATU, calling for the public to be educated about the need to obtain and maintain family-wage jobs in Oregon.

"Anytime we see the threat to family-wage jobs our state, elected

officials have to come forward," Sorenson said.

Sorenson denounced the LTD management for its handling of the contract negotiations.

Sorenson, who recently declared his candidacy for the 2006 Democratic nomination for governor, said it is important to educate everyone about the importance of a good labor community, adding that negotiation is the only way to obtain and maintain fair labor practices.

"Benefits and wages do not come unilaterally, they come through negotiation," Sorenson said.

Between speeches, LTD driver Carl Faddis performed a number of songs that he had written about the ongoing contract negotiations between LTD and the union, which have been going on since May.

Faddis said what many others had already said: that the last thing the union wanted to do was harm the community, but agreeing to a contract they say is inadequate would harm the community more in the long run.

"We make our living with you, and not off of you," Faddis said.

ASUO officials are working to help coordinate carpools and plan a reimbursement process for the incidental fees that would normally go to LTD should a strike occur, ASUO Community and Housing Coordinator Scott Lu said.

The University is set to release a packet of information about additional parking around the University and

alternative ride services offered, but nothing can be confirmed until the packet is released, Lu said.

NEED A RIDE?

Car pool information is available at www.rideshare.us and the ASUO Web site, asuouregon.edu/.

Assault Prevention Shuttle will be running its usual hours, 6 p.m. to midnight Sunday through Thursday and 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. Friday and Saturday.

University officials have said the parking lot at Autzen Stadium will be open during the day free of charge and security will be monitoring the lot and the walkway between campus and the stadium.

The 2004-05 service contract between LTD and the University allots \$583,250 in student fees to be used to provide unlimited bus service to University students.

"LTD has agreed to reimburse all money that would have been paid for that day," Lu said.

The University pays for the service every term, so the money that will be reimbursed will go toward spring term's balance and the remaining funds will go the ASUO Student Senate surplus, Lu said.

Lu said details cannot be confirmed on any type of reimbursement process or alternative transportation plan until he has more information.

The agreement to reimburse student fees was reached between LTD Service Planning and Marketing Manager Andy Vobora and Ravassipour. Ravassipour said the details of the arrangement haven't been figured out yet but plans are in the works.

"We haven't nailed down all the details, but we know we want to make sure kids can get to campus," Ravassipour said.

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WHAT WILL YOU DO IF THE LTD BUS DRIVERS GO ON STRIKE?



"If I had to use something for transportation other than walking, I guess I'd ask my friends or my parents."

ADAM HOWARD | NON-ADMIT GRAD STUDENT



"There are going to be a lot of people who are screwed. I'm going to carpool, but if I can't make that possible I'll just walk or bike."

PETER SKY | FRESHMAN



"I might have to walk. It's going to be a little bit of an inconvenience, but I can't do anything about it."

EUGENE AHN | JUNIOR



"I'd be in support of it and I'll ride my bike. It's the workers that keep the country going."

ELAINE PHILLIPS | UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEE