



Mediator Wendy Greenwald and Vice President for ATU Division 757 Jonathan Hunt converse between the mediation sessions on Friday.

LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

## LTD: Parties squabble over safety inspection

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with the union's action committee today to plan and strategize for a strike he says union members are prepared to go through with.

"We do not want to go strike, but it would be foolish to wait 'til Friday to start to prepare," Allred said.

Friday's mediation session lasted more than eight hours, with union representatives and LTD representatives in separate rooms of the Hilton Eugene Hotel and professional mediator Wendy Greenwald serving as a room-to-room messenger and negotiation facilitator between the two bargaining sides.

Both sides contend the other failed to bring anything new to the bargaining table. Hunt accused LTD of merely "shuffling stuff around," and LTD Service Planning and Marketing Manager Andy Vobora dismissed the union's claim of agreeing to the district's proposed health-care plan and saving the district more than \$332,000 with its new offer.

"While we had some agreement on the type of plan, we were still off on the cost," Vobora said.

Hunt said the union proposed a one-year wage freeze.

But Vobora said because the freeze would apply to the contract that expires on June 30, it did not make sense to freeze wages after implementing a wage increase with the current contract offer.

"It would expire June 30 — we would never stop bargaining," Vobora said about the wage freeze. "We

would really prefer to have a three-year contract."

Vobora said LTD's revised contract offer included the removal of the previously proposed 10-minute bus safety inspection time, which was the source of several claims filed in Lane County Circuit Court last week.

A judge dismissed two claims Thursday that LTD drivers and union representatives filed to stop LTD from implementing the change from a 15-minute bus safety inspection time to a 10-minute time.

A disabled LTD rider filed a similar claim against the district, and there will be a hearing Thursday to decide whether LTD is permitted to reduce safety inspection time in light of laws protecting disabled passengers.

"It didn't mean a thing to me that they withdrew that because it never should have been on the table, according to the judge," Allred said, referring to the judge's skepticism about the legal reasoning behind the district's change in safety inspection time.

Allred said that if the district was really serious about withdrawing the safety inspection time change, it would not have implemented the change reducing the safety inspection time on Sunday.

Neither side expects to offer any significant changes during Friday's mediation session because both say they have stretched as far as they can.

Vobora said the 4 percent wage increase the LTD Board of Directors had previously asked for when the

contract negotiations began in May has increased to around 5 percent.

"They were willing to do that to try to get a settlement," Vobora said.

But Hunt and Allred both said the main problem lies in the spending habits of the district. LTD has plenty of surplus funds but wants to save them for "a rainy day," Hunt said.

But, Hunt said, when the bus drivers are preparing to go out on strike, "it sounds like it's pouring out."

"We're not going to let them balance their budget on our members' backs," Hunt said.

Vobora said he will be meeting with the district's negotiating team today to debrief its members on Friday's mediation session, but he said he is not sure whether the board will meet this week to discuss any possible alterations to Friday's contract offer.

LTD General Manager Ken Hamm is at a conference with city officials in Washington, D.C., and will not be available to meet this week, Vobora said.

Allred said Hamm's absence is a reflection of his lack of concern for the contract negotiations, adding that the union's business representative was scheduled to attend the same conference but decided not to go because of the pending driver strike.

Vobora said Hamm's absence is not problematic because the district does not believe there is much more to discuss about the contract offers.

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## IN BRIEF

### Hussein's half brother captured by Syrians

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Iraqi officials said Sunday that Syria captured and handed over Saddam Hussein's half brother, a most-wanted leader in the Sunni-based insurgency, ending months of Syrian denials that it was harboring fugitives from the ousted Hussein regime. Iraq authorities said Damascus acted in a gesture of goodwill.

Sabawi Ibrahim al-Hassan, who shared a mother with Hussein, was nabbed along with 29 other fugitive members of the former dictator's Baath Party in Hasakah in northeastern Syria, 30 miles from the Iraqi border, the officials said on condition of anonymity. The U.S. military in Iraq had no immediate comment.

Al-Hassan's capture was the latest in a series of arrests of important insurgent figures that the government hopes will deal a crushing blow to the violent opposition forces.

### Israel's Sharon threatens to freeze peace attempts

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon threatened Sunday to freeze peace efforts if the Palestinian leadership does not crack down on militant groups after a weekend suicide bombing in Tel Aviv killed four Israelis and wounded dozens.

At a Cabinet meeting, Israel decided to suspend a plan to turn control of five West Bank towns over to the Palestinians and free 400 more prisoners. Those gestures were agreed upon at a Feb. 8 summit in Egypt, where Sharon and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas declared a truce.

The attack and the Israeli measures underlined the fragility of the truce and its vulnerability to violence by extremists who oppose any accommodation.

A familiar pattern appeared in danger of re-emerging: a truce, a Palestinian attack, Israeli retaliation, another Palestinian attack and

ultimately the end of the truce and rekindled violence.

### Thirteen states raise high school standards

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A coalition of 13 states confirmed plans Sunday to require tougher high school courses and diploma requirements, changes that could affect about one in three students.

The announcement is the most tangible sign that the nation's governors, gathered in the capital for a summit on improving high schools, want to see that progress quickly.

The participating states have committed to making their core high school classes and tests more rigorous and to match their graduation standards with the expectations of employers and colleges. They also pledged to hold colleges more accountable for ensuring students graduate.

Such changes would require time and significant legislative and political work, as teachers unions, school boards, legislatures and parents would be affected. Governors, state school chiefs and business executives will lead the efforts in each state.


### Pope surprises world with public appearance

VATICAN CITY — Touching his throat fitted with a breathing tube, Pope John Paul II on Sunday made a surprise first public appearance after surgery, appearing at his hospital window just moments after a Vatican official stood on the steps of St. Peter's Basilica to read the pontiff's appeal for prayers.

The 84-year-old pope did not speak during his one-minute greeting from Rome's Gemelli Polyclinic hospital, but sent an implicit and powerful message about his determination to maintain continuity in the church.

The appearance, in which the seated pope waved and appeared alert, raised hopes that he was making progress following a tracheotomy Thursday to ease a breathing crisis. The Vatican had previously announced John Paul would skip his weekly blessing — a 26-year tradition he did not miss even after he was shot in 1981 and recovered from an operation in 1992.

— The Associated Press




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