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IN BRIEF

Military members may get new state tax breaks

SALEM — Oregonians serving in the National Guard and military reserves would get new state tax breaks under a bill that is headed for the governor's desk.

The House unanimously approved Senate amendments to the measure Tuesday, sending it to Gov. Ted Kulongoski, who is expected to sign the bill.

All military pay for active duty served within Oregon would be exempt from state income taxes under the bill.

Current law excludes from taxes all pay for duty served outside the state, but the existing exemption is limited to \$3,000 of the pay for active duty served in Oregon.

The bill also allows survivors of service members to pay no state tax on federal military death benefits, which Congress this year has raised to \$100,000. The law now exempts \$3,000 of such benefits from taxes.

Under another provision of the measure, if a service member dies while on active duty, any taxes, interest and penalties owed for the period of active duty would be eliminated.

The bill is one of a number that the Legislature has crafted to help returning veterans. Thousands of Oregonians from the National Guard and the regular military have been sent to the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Woman held without bail for murder of 4-year-old

OREGON CITY — A woman charged with murdering her 4-year-old step-grandson and dumping his body in the forest along a rural road was ordered held without bail at a brief court appearance Tuesday.

Christine Coffman, 43, was arraigned by closed-circuit television from her cell at the Clackamas County jail.

Coffman stared ahead without expression as Clackamas County Circuit Judge Ronald Thom read the charge of aggravated murder. She confirmed her name, but did not enter a plea.

In documents filed with the court, Greg Horner, the county's chief deputy district attorney, said that Coffman "unlawfully and intentionally caused the death of Matal Sanchez, a human being under the age of 14 years."

After the hearing, Horner said the child's age led prosecutors to file the aggravated murder charge,

which carries a possible death penalty. A grand jury was expected to return a formal indictment on July 12.

An autopsy by the state medical examiner concluded the child died of one or more blows to the head.

The boy disappeared from his home in the Portland suburb of Milwaukie last Wednesday.

Three days later, Coffman led police to the body in the forest off a rural road near Estacada in the foothills of the Cascade Range, about 25 miles from the boy's home.

Investigators said Matal disappeared about the same time Coffman left to run an errand, leading police to believe the child was with her.

When Coffman returned several hours later, she was alone and her clothes were stained red, according to witnesses.

Police have not provided any details and have declined to say whether the stains were blood.

New school funding plan proposed for Oregon

SALEM — Gov. Ted Kulongoski proposed a new school funding plan Wednesday that would earmark a fixed share of general revenue for all education, from pre-kindergarten through graduate programs at state universities.

The Democratic governor's plan is a much broader version of a measure sponsored by Republican House Speaker Karen Minnis.

Minnis' plan would give 51 percent of personal income tax revenue to K-12 schools. Kulongoski recommends a budget floor for state-funded education of 61 percent of all general revenues, which includes corporate income taxes, cigarette taxes and other revenues.

Kulongoski's plan would not affect the next two-year budget now being crafted but would take effect for the 2007-09 budget.

The governor said his plan ends the traditional practice of funding education in separate pieces and "instead moves the entire education system forward as a seamless continuum."

Kulongoski praised Minnis' efforts to bringing stability to school funding but said a broader approach is needed.

"While we agree on the concept, we disagree on the details," the governor said.

The House, meanwhile, took a three-day break, on grounds that the Senate was lagging in its work.

Rep. Dennis Richardson, R-Central Point, said lawmakers should not just be "sitting around looking

busy" for lack of work while leaders try to break a lengthy stalemate deal on the 2005-07 budget.

But Rep. Jeff Merkley, leader of the House Democratic minority, said Richardson's claim was nonsense.

"We have plenty to do. There's been so little momentum toward getting to adjournment," Merkley said.

The House quit until 5 p.m. Sunday. The state constitution prohibits either chamber from quitting for more than three days without approval of the other house.

Voyeurists may face lawsuits if new bill passes

SALEM — High-tech voyeurs who use cell phones with cameras, hidden video recorders and other gadgets to spy on their victims may soon face lawsuits, following the passage of a bill expected to be signed by Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Lawmakers were prompted to pass the bill following several shocking cases of invasion of privacy, including a 2001 incident in which a man taped the Astoria High School girl's swimming team. The lens he used could see through the girls' bathing suits.

Under current law, the videotaped swimmers would have had to file criminal charges. The bill headed to Kulongoski would allow the victims to also sue for compensatory damage.

The legislation targets anyone who knowingly takes images of a person's "intimate areas" without their consent. It only applies if the victims are in places — such as bathrooms, locker rooms and tanning booths — where they would have a "reasonable expectation" of personal privacy.

"I just hope it gives these women a measure of comfort, knowing the disturbing situation they went through paved the way for the Legislature to respond," said one of the bill's sponsors, Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, who fielded calls from the families of the Astoria girls following the 2001 incident.

The new law would also apply to a recent Beaverton case, in which a couple photographed each other in sexual positions. When the relationship ended on a bad note, the man posted his ex-girlfriend's images on the Internet, along with her name and work address.

"We just think this is a little measure that can help us keep up with the technology," said Ron Brown, Clatsop County's chief deputy district attorney.

—The Associated Press

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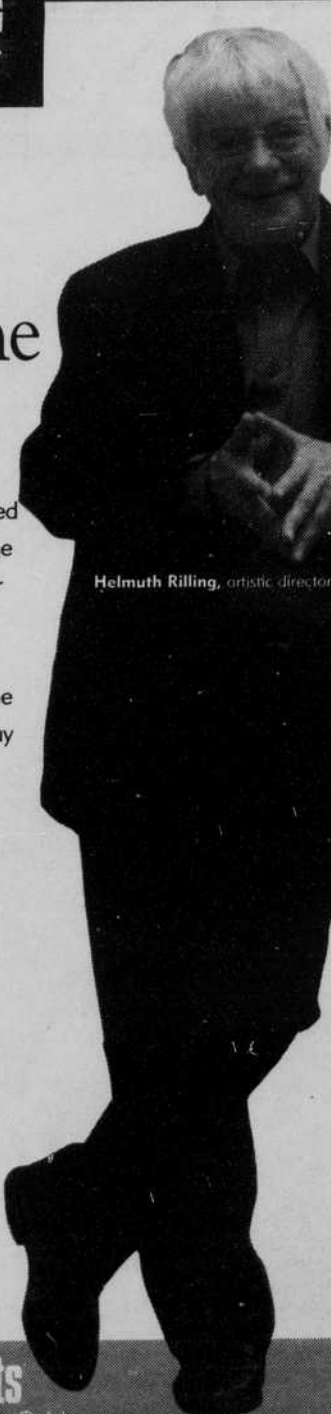
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