

Emergency funds for county possible barring Bush veto

Temporarily easing financial ills of Josephine County and other counties is possible through a one-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act included in an Emergency Supplemental funding bill.

The announcement was made by Congressmen Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) and Greg Walden (R-Hood River).

Without the funding, numerous counties in Ore-

gon and other states face major financial obstacles. The last payments to the counties were made in December for fiscal year 2006.

Regarding the potential one-year authorization, DeFazio said late last week, "This news comes as a welcome victory in our fight to continue the successful and critical county payments program."

"For months, my sole focus has been finding a

way to ensure these payments continue, to keep rural schools open, roads maintained and law enforcement patrolling.

"Our hard work paid off, thanks to the Democratic leadership's understanding of the critical need for this program. This is an important first step, and I will continue to fight to keep this funding in the bill.

"We still have hurdles to overcome before this

short-term reauthorization is a reality," said DeFazio. "Once we get this funding passed, we will begin to work on a longer-term solution, which will need to be initiated on the Senate side."

Last year, the county payments program provided nearly \$280 million to 33 Oregon counties for services like schools, roads and law enforcement.

Counties receiving funding under the program, such

as Josephine County, have a high proportion of federally owned lands. Prior to enactment of the county payments program, they had received a percentage of receipts from timber harvests, which fluctuated year-to-year. However, harvest levels decreased precipitously in the late 1990s due to changes in federal forest policy.

During 2000, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community

Self-Determination Act to help stabilize payments and ensure proper funding for vital county services.

DeFazio and Walden also have introduced HR 17 that would reauthorize the county payments program for an additional seven years. The bill includes \$400 million, which would be disbursed for the counties' 2007 fiscal year, which will begin July 1.

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CAREER DAY at Lorna Byrne Middle School on Wednesday, March 7 was supported by 43 Illinois Valley and Grants Pass organizations. They included (top, from left) Craig Wagner of Great Cats World Park with an African caracal; Illinois Valley Fire District Firefighter Joe Brown demonstrating rescue techniques in smoky situations; whitewater rafts from Rogue Wilderness Adventures; and Joe Gonzalez, who retired as a welder last year from Rough & Ready Lumber Co. (Photos by Dale & Elaine Sandberg/IVN')



Armed men enter Kerby home, flee in stolen car

A nationwide all-points bulletin has been issued following a home invasion with gunfire in Kerby by armed men wearing ski masks early Tuesday, March 13, said Josephine County Sheriff's Office (JCSO).

The gangsters also fled in the victim's car.

The incident was reported at 3:49 a.m. by Richard Schaller Jr., of School Street. He was in the home with his wife and their three children. His father was in an adjacent trailer, JCSO related.

The children, an infant and a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old, were asleep and not contacted by the suspects. Besides invading the home, apparently to commit robbery, the men stole the victim's car, a silver-colored 1999 four-door Buick Century. The Oregon license plate is YNJ 041.

Schaller's wife is Misty

Starr Giroux, 26; and his father is Richard Henry Schaller Sr., 57, said JCSO.

The elder Schaller was treated at Three Rivers Community Hospital in Grants Pass for bumps, lacerations and contusions, the sheriff's office said.

The younger Schaller phoned 911 to report that suspects wearing ski masks, and armed with guns, entered his home to commit robbery. A shot was fired, and the victim struggled with the invaders, JCSO reported.

Investigators are working on suspect descriptions. Additional information will be released pending further investigation, said JCSO.

The agency added that anyone with information about the incident is encouraged to phone the Major Crimes Unit at 474-5153, Ext. 3523. Callers also can use the tip line at 474-5160.

Jobless rate higher

Josephine County total payroll employment fell by 380 jobs during January, as many industries reduced staffing levels, and the unemployment rate reached 8.4 percent said Oregon Employment Dept. (OED).

There were 32,143 persons employed in the county during January, meaning that 2,949 in the total civilian labor force were jobless. Nonfarm payroll employment figures show that 25,160 had jobs during January this year.

For 2006, the January unemployment rate was 7.6 percent. It was 7.1 percent in December.

During the past 12

months, payroll employment declined by 90 jobs in the county. The latest employment statistics are based on newly revised or "benchmarked" numbers. Once each year, employment estimates are updated, based on complete counts of workers from employer's payroll tax records.

Oregon's job growth has been slowing for the past six months, and Josephine County has not been immune to the softening trend, said OED.

Construction employment fell by 70 in January, as weather and a slow housing market contributed to

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Civil union bill aims to ratify same-sex partnerships

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

For more than 30 years, Basic Rights Oregon (BRO) has fought to end discrimination based on sexual orientation.

But two bills currently being considered in the Oregon Legislature may remove some of the legal hurdles faced by homosexual and lesbian couples throughout the state.

Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 2007 were introduced for consideration earlier this month, originating from a task force on equality set up by Gov. Kulongoski after the 2005 legislative session.

Similar legislation, in the form of Senate Bill 1000, was introduced during 2005. It passed the Senate, but was denied a vote in the Republican-controlled House.

Politics played a big part in the legislative demise of SB 1000, according to BRO Communications Director Melissa Cherniak.

"When it got to the House, then-speaker Karen Minnis refused to allow it to come to a vote on the floor of the House," Cherniak said. "She would not let that bill out of committee."

SB 1000 was referred to the House State and Federal

Affairs Committee, chaired by Rep. Wayne Krieger (R-Gold Beach). What happened next involved much legislative maneuvering.

"Chair Krieger, with less than an hour's notice, convened a work session and banned public organizations, advocates and other legislators from testifying on the bill," Cherniak said.

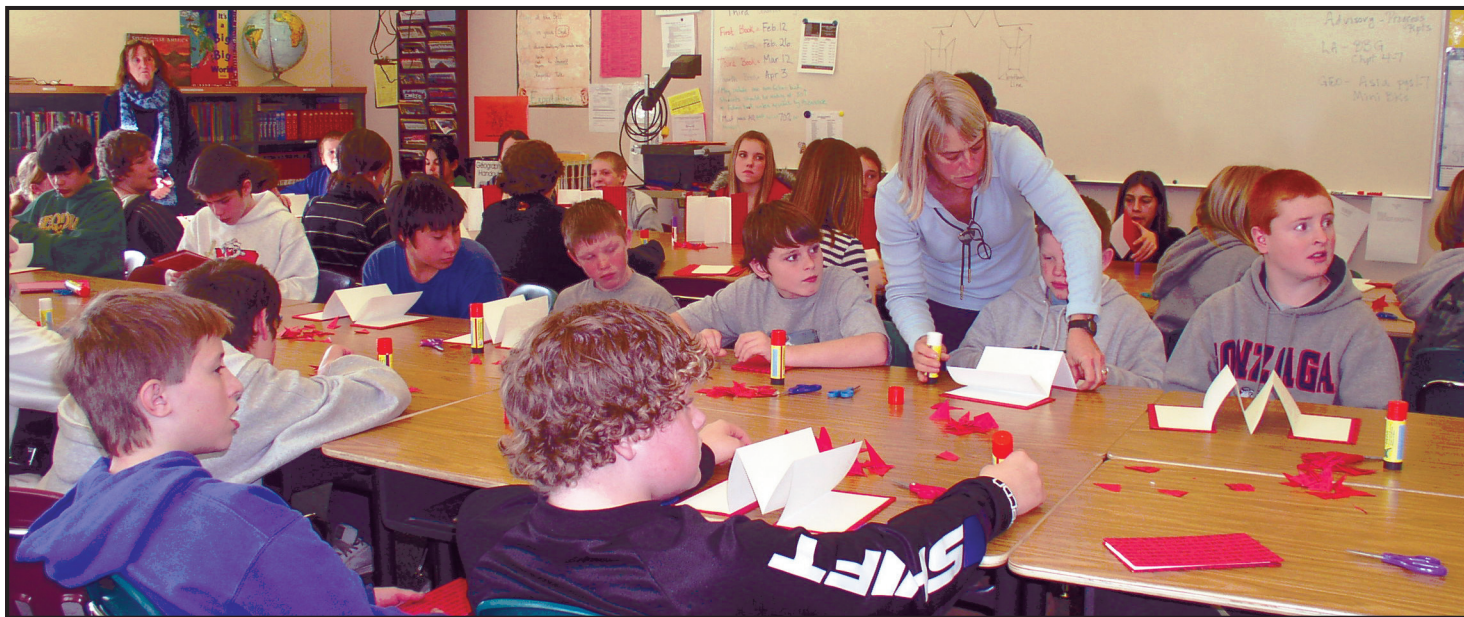
The full text of SB 1000 was then deleted and replaced by a reciprocal benefits bill in a process referred to as a "gut-and-stuff." Rep. Peter Buckley (D-Ashland) said it is a tactic to prevent legislation from passing.

"The gut-and-stuff

process is where the contents of a bill are removed and the framework of the bill is kept intact, and other content is put in," Buckley said. "It's a way to kill a bill or change it to something different that you want to get passed."

Rep. Mary Nolan (D-Portland) attempted to reintroduce civil union legislation toward the end of the 2005 session. However, Minnis and the House Republican leadership sent it to the Ways and Means Committee, where it languished until the session adjourned in August.

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AN ASIAN ART PROJECT, presented by Illinois River Valley Arts Council and Learning Through Art, was

held at Lorna Byrne Middle School. Story on page 4. (Photo by Dale & Elaine Sandberg/IVN')

Insurance pool opposed

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

During its Monday, March 12 evening meeting, the Three Rivers School District (TRSD) Board of Education voted to oppose Senate Bill 426, which would establish a statewide insurance pool for school employees.

TRSD Superintendent Jerry Fritts asked if the board needed to take a position against the proposed legislation. Human Resources Director Debbie Breckner stated that several school districts throughout the state have voted to oppose the bill.

Breckner said that she contacted the office of House District 3 Rep. Ron Maurer (R-Grants Pass) to express concerns about the legislation, and e-mailed other representatives.

"We don't know what the impact will be," Fritts said, adding that the proposed law could cost the district up to \$1.5 million in additional fees.

Fritts said that he would like to see an impartial actuarial study conducted before the bill becomes law.

Breckner said that Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA), which has its

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