

# EL OBSERVADOR



Astor Middle School custodian Dan Strong wears protective clothing as he prepares to "punch" a boiler. The cleaning process that keeps soot out of the ventilation system is vital to students' health.

PHOTO BY DAVID PLECHL/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

## Janitors Plead for Jobs

continued from Front

Strong agrees and adds, "The district is not putting the safety of the kids first."

PHC admits it would need to train its employees in the operation of the boilers.

Cropper says the low wages offered by rehabilitation facilities equals high turnover in the work force, incompatible with the myriad duties of today's janitors who often act as security guards, providing school officials with extra sets of eyes and ears that can tell at a glance who belongs in the school and who doesn't.

"I know all the kids, all the kids know me," Strong said, "I know their parents. If I see someone that looks out of place, I tell someone."

Board members will make their final decision. Members Marc Abrams and Derry Jackson have consistently voted in favor of keeping the current work force.

Supporters of the union contend that at least three of the members are still persuadable. Lorenzo Poe, they say, is one of those riding the fence.

Supporters of the union contend the job losses would deal a

devastating blow to these families and the communities they live in. The PTA, Rainbow Coalition, the Oregon Alliance of Black School Educators have all come out in support of the custodians.

Cropper calls the budget of his unionized custodians "a drop in the bucket" in a public school's deficit of nearly \$58 million and a state deficit approaching \$1 billion. He contends it's up to the state legislators to come up with the money necessary to keep his people working.

At the end of the day, Strong prepares to "punch" one of his two boilers. He is giving them extra attention as the end of the school year approaches. The machine-assisted process helps remove dangerous soot that accumulates throughout the burning process. He is reflecting on the 17 years he has spent working to keep his schools safe and clean, and looking nervously to the board meeting that will decide his fate.

"The district is looking at the kids last in this equation," he says, staring hard into the black soot on his hands, "The upkeep of the schools and safety of the children should really be their first priority."

## Americas Sign Anti-Terrorism Treaty

(AP) — Foreign ministers from throughout the Americas signed a new treaty Monday to prevent and punish terrorism, saying a coordinated response is needed to confront a complicated threat.

Thirty of the 34 OAS members approved the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism, which is intended to prevent the financing of terrorism, toughen

border controls and strengthen cooperation between the region's law enforcement agencies.

The four nations that did not sign — Canada, Dominica, the Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago — need additional time to implement changes required by the treaty, OAS officials said.

The treaty, negotiated as a result of the Sept. 11 attacks in

the United States, requires that each country create a financial intelligence unit and implement strict measures to detect cross-border movements of cash that could be used to fund terrorism.

Countries joining the pact also agree to transfer detainees whose testimony is needed in anti-terrorism investigations, and to deny asylum or refugee status to terrorist suspects.



U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, right, speaks with representatives from Peru and Venezuela at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session of the Organization of American States General Assembly in Barbados.

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