

Axe Falls on Gregory Heights, Rose City Park, Kellogg Schools

Humboldt closure delayed

Two northeast Portland schools and one southeast Portland school were approved for closure Monday night by a Portland School Board looking for ways to cut expenses in the wake of falling tax support and declining enrollment. The axe fell on Gregory Heights Middle School, 7334 N.E. Siskiyou St.; Kellogg Middle School, 3330 S.E. 69th Ave.; and Rose City Park Elementary School, 2334 N.E. 57th

Ave. The board plans to meet again on Thursday to decide the fate of Hollywood, Rieke and Portsmouth schools and an unnamed school in the Sellwood neighborhood. Monday's decision came before a packed audience of parents, community members and school officials. Many spoke out against closing schools in areas that were economically depressed or had large

minority populations. The school district also plans to transition 12 schools to a kindergarten through 8th Grade format, eliminating many middle schools. Last week, a recommendation to close Humboldt Elementary in north Portland for the upcoming school year was given more time, following intense opposition.

Humboldt parents and supporters have said the school has drawn relatively high achievement from the lowest-income children in the district and argued that low-income children do better in smaller schools. They also noted the difficulty of folding the elementary into Ockley Green Middle School, located across Interstate 5.

Ex-School Janitors May Get Millions

Court upholds lawsuit victory

Portland Public School's attempt to get cheaper labor four years ago backfired in their faces again last week, when the Oregon Supreme Court refused to reconsider an October 2005 ruling, stating that the district violated state labor laws when it fired the workers in 2002. More than 300 custodians who were replaced by contract employees remain protected by last year's 4-3 court decision. Contracting out the custodians saved the district \$10.8 million over two years, according to a 2004 audit. The decision, however, was devastating to the hundreds of workers not able to find other jobs. Now the ex-employees may be awarded \$64 million in back wages

—calculated by the custodian's wages of about \$16 million in the last year of their contract, including benefits and retirement costs, adding up to \$64 million in back pay over the past four years. But that sum could be reduced by wages custodians earned in other jobs. Complicated negotiations between both parties will likely start when the district's contract with private contractor Portland Habilitation Center expires June 30, according to Jim Coon, an attorney representing the custodians. "There are more than 300 individual stories," he said. "We're hoping the district and we can work that out as an amicable thing."

Deadline Nears for Medicare Part D

Seniors who don't sign up face penalty

African American leaders are urging seniors to sign up for the new Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage. If they do not sign up for a prescription drug plan by May 15, they will face a possible lifetime premium penalty. While enrollment is voluntary, many seniors are not taking advantage of this important health benefit, particularly those with limited incomes who may qualify for extra help paying for their

prescription drug plans. If a person who qualifies for Medicare Part D does not enroll by the May 15 deadline, they will be penalized one percent for each month they are not enrolled (for the rest of their life). That's one percent per month more for the cost of their monthly premiums. African American church leaders and others are urging family members to help their loved ones enrolled in Medicare to sign up now, so they do not experience a gap in prescription drugs coverage or have to pay a penalty. There will be an opportunity to enroll Thursday, May 4, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Maranatha Church, 4222 N.E. 12th Ave.

Light Shines on Darfur Genocide

Hundreds of protesters, including Democrat Congressman Earl Blumenauer gathered at Pioneer Square in downtown Portland Sunday, calling for an end to the conflict in Darfur. Similar protests occurred nationwide, including one on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. There, actors, politicians and religious leaders joined thousands of dem-

onstrators to bring attention to mass casualties and ask the Bush Administration to take action. The Darfur region in western Sudan has been a place where more than 200,000 people have been killed. More than two million have been driven from their homes in what's being called the first genocide of the 21st century.

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