

50¢

38 years of community service

HOUSING Special Edition See coverage inside



May 20 Primary

Last Day to Register: April 29

www.oregonvotes.org 1-866-ORE-VOTES



The Portland Observer

'City of Roses'

Volume XXXVIII, Number 14

Established in 1970

Committed to Cultural Diversity

www.portlandobserver.com

Wednesday • April 2, 2008

Week in The Review



Bill Visits, Hillary Due

Former President Bill Clinton visited OHSU and a senior center in Portland on Monday on behalf of his wife's presidential campaign.

Voters Switch Parties

In the past seven weeks, nearly 10,000 Oregonians have registered to vote in the May 20 Democratic Primary featuring Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. Hillary Clinton.

Housing Secretary Resigns

As federal authorities investigate whether he had given lucrative housing contracts to friends, Housing Secretary Alphonso R. Jackson resigned on Monday.

Sean Levert, a third of the 1980s R&B trio LeVert and son of lead O'Jays singer Eddie Levert, has died after falling ill while serving a jail term for failing to pay child support.

R&B Singer Dies

Sean Levert, a third of the 1980s R&B trio LeVert and son of lead O'Jays singer Eddie Levert, has died after falling ill while serving a jail term for failing to pay child support.

Questioning Big Oil

U.S. oil company executives told a House committee looking for answers to record fuel costs Tuesday that they know high prices are hurting consumers, but deflected any blame and argued their profits — \$123 billion last year — were in line with other industries.

Iraqi Violence Spikes

Fighting between security forces and Shiite militiamen last month has driven civilian deaths in Iraq to their highest level in more than six months, government figures showed on Tuesday.

Election Mayhem

Zimbabwe's elections commission tried to calm growing disquiet Tuesday at the delay in announcing the results of three-day-old presidential polls, amid warnings that the country was teetering on anarchy.

For Lease: MLK Properties

High market prices blamed for vacancies

BY LEE PERLMAN THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

In some ways, Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is hopping, with new projects either under construction, on the ground or in the pipeline.

Months after its completion, the Fremont Project at the intersection of MLK and Fremont Street stands empty, its anchor Terroir Restaurant having failed.

African-American business leader Ray Leary and neighborhood activist Jeana Woolley spent years trying to attract tenants for the Vanport Project on MLK north of Alberta before they hit upon a commercial condominium idea that attracted individual owners.

Veteran commercial broker Michelle Reeves says part of the problem is that some of the new buildings, such as the Fremont Project, are isolated.

"In the Hawthorne, Mississippi and Alberta districts, you started with existing older buildings," she told the Portland Observer. "Even on Martin Luther King at Russell you had older buildings to start with, and that area's thriving."

Reeves says when you have a district



A signature Portland Development Commission-backed project at Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Fremont Street sits mostly empty with signs in the windows offering space for lease.

that's still developing like MLK, the single most important factor for a potential tenant is the price. The break-even rate for new buildings is \$16 to \$18 per square foot, she says.

Reeves says some projects that got financial assistance from the Portland Development Commission in a good real-estate market are now struggling with a downturn in the market.

For such projects to succeed now, PDC would need to provide additional assistance such as tenant improvements, or subsidies to tenants based on ground floor utilization or other public benefits.

Wentland, who also owns a vacant block on the east side of the avenue between Fargo and Cook streets, says he has put off earlier plans to develop it.

"This is a really bad climate to try out something new," he says, "and the people who finance development projects are really afraid of it."

A partial inventory of new projects on MLK includes the following:

*Piedmont Place. The PDC owned site between Northeast Rosa Parks Place and Highland Street is currently negotiating its sale to developer Tom Walsh and the Portland Community Land Trust. They propose

continued on page A7

Bridging the Divide

Controversial I-5 project on fast track

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Plans are on the fast track for a new Interstate 5 bridge crossing the Columbia River.

Construction could begin as soon as 2010 for a \$3.1 billion to \$4.2 billion project if a coalition of public transportation-management and government agencies has its way.

Proponents argue that a new bridge is necessary to relieve rush-hour congestion, allow for mass transit, protect against earthquakes, and improve access for freight, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Planners have already enlisted the support of several politicians and local trade unions behind building something soon.

A public-comment period during the next couple months will go a long way in influencing votes on whether the Portland City Council, Metro regional government, and other city and county jurisdictions back the initiative.

Momentum is also growing to question the efficacy of building a new connection that will push the transportation grid with tens of thousands of additional vehicle trips per day.

An organization called Columbia River Crossing, based in Vancouver and developed through a partnership of the Washington and Oregon transportation departments, has organized regular meetings in an at-



Community activist Marcia Ward (left) speaks with Carley Francis of the Columbia River Crossing project about the future of connections between Oregon and Washington.

PHOTOS BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A transportation department maintenance worker, Dave Lowles believes that something should be resolved soon to ease the congestion on the Interstate 5 bridge in and out of Vancouver during rush hours.



tempt to address all the issues, but some attending have left unsure that the bridge will pay off for taxpayers.

A resident of Vancouver who commutes to Portland and meets with the group's Community and Environmental Justice committee, Marcia Ward is trying to represent low-income commuters.

Carley Francis of the Columbia River Crossing says it's likely that daily toll fees will be needed in addition to local, state and federal funds.

Ward would appreciate a new bridge to ease traffic congestion but argues that no one should have to pay extra taxes.

continued on page A7

PRESCRIPTION POSTAGE PAID PERMIT NO. 1610